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CANADIAN PLAYS
FROM
HART HOUSE THEATRE

VOLUME II

CANADIAN PLAYS

FROM

HART HOUSE THEATRE

EDITED BY

VINCENT MASSEY

VOLUME II

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THE GOD OF GODS

BY

CARROLL AIKINS

CHARACTERS

YELLOW SNAKE [*a singer*].
AMBURI [*Chief of the Seven Feathers*].
MABLO [*his son*].
LERII [*a mad old man*].
SUIVA [*a girl of the tribe*].
KOTWI [*her mother*].
WANING MOON [*Priestess of the God of Gods*].
OLD MEN, OLD WOMEN } [*worshippers*].

The GOD OF GODS was first produced at the Birmingham (England) Repertory Theatre in 1919. It was also produced at Hart House Theatre in April, 1922, with the following Cast:

Yellow Snake	R. DE R. ACKLOM
Amburi	E. A. DALE
Mablo	G. F. MCFARLAND
Lerii	WILFRID MAVOR
Suiva	LORNA MCLEAN
Kotwi	GRACE WEBSTER
Waning Moon	DORA MCMILLAN
Worshippers	MARIE BAYNON, LOUISE BROWN, JANE HINDS, GERTRUDE MCKEOWN, EDITH MCLAREN, HELEN RYAN, MARY SMITH, HELEN TEMPLETON, MADELEINE GALBRAITH, BETTY WEDD, ROBERT HACKBORN, A. C. CHELEW, GILPIN BROWN, WALLACE HOUSE, KENNETH KETCHUM, JOHN MCLEAN, EDGAR STONE.

THE GOD OF GODS

ACT I

The scene represents the edge of a grassy, pine-clad plateau overlooking a lake and a range of mountains. To the left is a small circular tepee of weatherstained birch bark. To the extreme right is a large rock. The right entrances are before and behind this rock. The left entrance is well forward, screened by small trees. Near the tepee is a cooking oven of blackened stones, and beside it, an earthenware water pot. At right-centre is a fallen log, and above it an old pine with heavy foliage.

The time is before sunrise of a June morning.

As the curtain rises YELLOW SNAKE, *a young Indian, steals in from the right. He wears a cougar skin tunic and carries a small bouquet of red berries and white blossoms. He approaches the tepee cautiously and is about to lay his offering at the entrance when he is startled by a loud sneeze from within. He withdraws in a panic and, as the sneeze is followed by some further commotion, climbs a nearby tree and hides in the foliage.*

KOTWI, *a fat squaw, dressed in a gaudy blanket, backs out of the tepee and looks about her suspiciously.*

KOTWI. Who's there? [*She goes about grunting, looking behind rocks and trees.* WANING MOON *enters from the left. She is a thin old hag of a squaw and*

wears a ceremonial white garment ornamented with a silver crescent-moon. KOTWI *turns and sees her.*] Oh! it's you, is it? I thought it was a hill dog.

WANING MOON [*stonily*]. Have you forgotten what I am?

[KOTWI *comes forward apologetically, inclines her head, and clasps her hands behind it.*]

KOTWI. The God is great. He giveth us full bellies.

WANING MOON. The God is good to them that love his priestess.

KOTWI. I love you well.

WANING MOON. The God will hear me when I pray for you. And he will fill your belly.

KOTWI [*raising her head*]. The God is great. He is the God of Gods.

[*Their tones, which have been ritualistic, return to normal.*]

WANING MOON [*seating herself on a log*]. He gets no older. It's not so with us. My legs are like the willows.

KOTWI. Aie! We're getting on. And soon they'll grind our meat between two stones. Shall I call Suiva? Have you eaten yet?

WANING MOON. Yes, I have eaten. Leave the girl to sleep.

KOTWI. You're up early and far from the God's altar. Is there evil word?

WANING MOON. No word at all. The God is drunk, and happy in his dreams. But I wake early, and I'm glad to wake. My days are not so many as they were.

KOTWI. You needn't fear. The God will guide you to his Yellow Tent.

WANING MOON. I'm not afraid. But there must be a girl to take my place. Or do you want the holy fire to die?

KOTWI. No! How should we eat if the fire died? And the God angry? Ask him to make haste!

WANING MOON. I'm not dead yet. You keep your tongue tied up!

KOTWI. I meant no harm. Who is it he will choose? Is it Water Plume or old Coyote's daughter?

WANING MOON. She must be virgin.

KOTWI. Aie! Then they won't do!

WANING MOON. I thought that Water Plume . . . .

KOTWI. She! You might as well believe the world is round like a sheep's bladder! She, a virgin! Pouf!

WANING MOON. The God will know.

KOTWI. He has sharp eyes, then. She is a sly one—ough! I won't let Suiva fish in the same stream. When will he choose the girl?

WANING MOON. The God is drunk. He bids me choose the girl.

KOTWI. And you've come here! Is it my Suiva that you want? [*Eagerly*] Eh? Is it Suiva? [*Calling*] Suiva!

WANING MOON. Not so fast! You're like the other mothers. They all want their girls to be the Young Moon. Why is that?

KOTWI. I can't speak for the others. For myself, I fear the God, and I will give my daughter.

WANING MOON [*knowingly*]. Aie!

KOTWI. Why do you say "Aie"? What is there more that I can give than my own child, my Suiva? The God is great but he is old, and lives in the deep pool. No man has seen him; only his stone image. He is great, but she is young and like the doe in springtime. It is not sweet to live without a man! And yet I give her.

WANING MOON. Aie! You give her!

KOTWI. Well?

WANING MOON. When the fat deer are brought, and the bears' hearts, and the wild ducks and turtles, and burnt upon the altar, what does the God get of them?

KOTWI. He gets the smell.

WANING MOON. And who gets the meat?

KOTWI. Who should get it, if not the God's own priestess?

WANING MOON. And what does she do with it?

KOTWI. She eats it.

WANING MOON. And what she cannot eat!

KOTWI. She gives to the old and sick, and those who cannot see.

WANING MOON. And maybe, her own people? Her own mother, eh?

KOTWI. Maybe. It's not of that I think.

WANING MOON. Old Coyote offered me five cows if I would choose his daughter.

KOTWI. He is a liar, and his cows are sick. I'll give you five good cows.

WANING MOON. I am the daughter of the God.

KOTWI. I meant no harm.

WANING MOON. I must have ten cows.

KOTWI. Ten! Aie! But you are the daughter of the God! What do you want of ten cows?

WANING MOON. I want them for my nephew, Shiny Bird.

KOTWI. Your nephew?

WANING MOON. For ten cows, he will keep me till I die.

KOTWI [*indignantly*]. That won't be long. And now you don't eat much. Ten cows! Bah! He's a tight-skinned ground-hog, Shiny Bird! He wants his meat all fat!

WANING MOON. He won't take less.

KOTWI. Give me but seven and I'll keep you!

WANING MOON. He has a house with stones for a big fire. The stones are warm in winter.

KOTWI. We have dry cedar brought and many deer-skins. You would be happy with us, Waning Moon.

WANING MOON. I like to sleep with warm stones in my bed.

KOTWI. You shall have warm stones here.

WANING MOON. No, it's more fitting that I should die with my own people.

KOTWI. Aie! That's so. Well, I have asked you. Remember that I have asked you.

WANING MOON. The God will thank you. But, as I can't come here, how would you like your girl to take my place?

KOTWI. Where shall I find ten cows?

WANING MOON. You! You have five times ten!

KOTWI. I had when my man died. But now the most are stolen.

WANING MOON. Is that truth? I hadn't heard it.

KOTWI. Stolen, or died of the mouth sickness. It's hard to be a widow!

WANING MOON. That's so. That's so. Well, if you haven't ten cows. . . . [*She rises painfully.*] Anyway, I doubt that Suiva would have pleased the God. The girl must be a virgin.

KOTWI. She is that! If any gabbing squaw has told you that she's not, she lies! She lies!

WANING MOON [*sardonically*]. Aie! Aie!

KOTWI. There's never a man has touched her ankle-ring!

WANING MOON. Not Yellow Snake, the singer?

KOTWI. Not he, nor any other. I watch her like the mother grouse, her chick.

[YELLOW SNAKE *follows the various turns of their conversation with interested but restrained pantomime.*]

WANING MOON. How old is she?

KOTWI. The fingers of four hands.

WANING MOON. And has not tried her wings?

KOTWI. I swear she has not! You should not listen to such evil tongues.

WANING MOON. They swim together by the salmon traps.

KOTWI. Maybe they do. Cannot a virgin swim?

WANING MOON. Not with Yellow Snake. He has wild ways and does not fear the God.

KOTWI. Aie! But she fears the God. Every day she prays to him when the sun comes and goes. She fears him so, I'd rather die than tell her all that we've been saying. Your ten cows and all! It's a hard life for widows. [*She begins to sniffle.*]

WANING MOON. You're a good woman, Kotwi. And now I'll tell you something that you'll like to hear.

KOTWI. What's that?

WANING MOON. You know the Chief's son, Mablo . . .

KOTWI [*sharply*]. Aie!

WANING MOON. He wants your Suiva for his woman.

KOTWI. How do you know?

WANING MOON. He told me so himself.

KOTWI. The God be praised! You're a good woman, Waning Moon. I hope you get your ten cows. Mablo! There's a man! With his own house and cattle! You don't catch Mablo swimming by the traps. And when Amburi dies, he'll be the Chief. Chief of the Seven Feathers! He'll smoke the silver pipe, and wear the yellow on his cheeks! And Suiva, my little Suiva, will be his woman! The God be praised!

WANING MOON. Yes, if she'll have him.

KOTWI. Have him? Of course, she'll have him! There's not a girl in all the world who wouldn't have him. When is he going to ask her?

WANING MOON. Pretty soon. He's afraid that Yellow Snake will get her.

KOTWI. I'll see to that!

WANING MOON. Don't tell her what I've told you.

KOTWI. Why not?

WANING MOON. I promised Mablo that I wouldn't tell. Good-bye.

KOTWI. You've made me happy like the jumping trout! [WANING MOON *eyes her stonily.* KOTWI *bends her head and clasps her hands behind her.*] The God is great. He giveth us full bellies.

WANING MOON. The God is good to them that love his priestess.

KOTWI. I love you well.

WANING MOON. The God will hear me when I pray for you. And he will fill your belly.

KOTWI [*with fervour*]. The God is great! He is the God of Gods! [*She raises her head.* WANING MOON *turns and goes out to the left, walking with ceremonious dignity.* KOTWI, *highly delighted, goes to the tepee and calls*] Suiva! Oh, Suiva!

SUIVA [*off, sleepily*]. Yes?

KOTWI. Wake up! Wake up! A great girl like you!

SUIVA. Is it the prayer hour?

KOTWI. Soon. The hills are bright. The sun is on the second ridge. Be quick!

SUIVA. I am putting on my tunic . . . . Your voice is happy. Have you snared a grouse?

KOTWI. Maybe.

SUIVA A big one?

KOTWI. Aie! Maybe a very big one!

SUIVA. A blue grouse?

KOTWI. A grouse with yellow on his cheeks. Di-di, di-di!

SUIVA [*calmly*]. There is no grouse with yellow on his cheeks. You snared a meadowlark.

KOTWI. That smokes a silver pipe.

SUIVA. Just now I dreamt that I heard voices.

KOTWI. It was so. But hurry! Quick! The sun will soon be up!

SUIVA. I'm coming! Who was here?

KOTWI. Old Waning Moon.

SUIVA. The Holy One!

KOTWI [*chuckling*]. The Holy One! Aie! Aie!

KOTWI. To talk of cows!

SUIVA. What did she want?

SUIVA. The moon is on you. Which way did she go?

KOTWI. The hill way—to the lake.

SUIVA. Was she alone?

KOTWI. You think the path is steep?

SUIVA [*reproachfully*]. You know the path is steep. I'll go and help her.

KOTWI. No! I'll go! I'll go! She's a good woman!

SUIVA [*emerging on hands and knees*]. Good! She's the God's daughter!

KOTWI [*going left*]. So she is! Get water from the spring and build the fire. But, first, your prayers. *Both* prayers.

SUIVA. You needn't tell me that! [KOTWI *goes out.* SUIVA *rises to her feet. She is a very beautiful Indian girl, barefoot, with loose hair, and wears a single fawn-skin garment which leaves one shoulder bare and does not fall below the knees. She goes to the centre of the scene, turns, and with arms outstretched, addresses the sun, which has half risen above the mountain.*] Give thanks, torchbearer, to the God of Gods! And fear him, lest he crush the hollow reed that gives thee breath beneath the great blue water! Fear him, torchbearer! [*She turns, comes forward, and kneels.*]

Great God of Gods, I am thy slave. I fear thee. Slay me not with tongue of fire in the crash of falling mountains.

Renew the springs, that I may drink. Renew thy sweat upon the maize fields. Break thou the knees of the fat deer that I may eat, I and my people.

Make sharp and swift the arrows of my people. Make blunt the daggers of our foes and break their bow-strings. Withhold thy torch from them and fill their mouths with poison.

Give me to mate a strong man in my season, and bind him to me with the twisted vine. And with

sweet balsam and sweet secret oil ease thou the labour of my child-bearing.

Or, choose me to thy service. Lay on my breast the face of the young moon and bid me be thy virgin. I will tend thy fire, and shear the foeman's hair to fill thy nose with incense.

Great God of Gods! I am thy slave. I fear thee. [*As she rises,* YELLOW SNAKE *throws the bouquet at her feet. She laughs, darts to it, picks it up, and peers about her to discover the thrower.*] Who are you?

YELLOW SNAKE [*mockingly*]. I am thy slave. I fear thee.

SUIVA [*reprovingly*]. Yellow Snake! Where are you?

YELLOW SNAKE. There, in your hand, red berries and white blossoms.

SUIVA. Come to me!

YELLOW SNAKE. I will not.

SUIVA [*peering in the long grass*]. Are you a field-mouse?

YELLOW SNAKE [*laughing*]. No.

SUIVA. A squirrel?

YELLOW SNAKE. No.

SUIVA. What are you, then?

YELLOW SNAKE. Your lover.

SUIVA [*seeing him, and clapping her hands*]. Yes!

YELLOW SNAKE. And singer of the glory in the morning!

[*He swings down from the tree and takes her in his arms.*]

SUIVA. Yellow Snake! [*He kisses her ardently. She struggles to free herself.*] No! No! You mustn't!

YELLOW SNAKE [*laughing and continuing his embrace*]. Why?

SUIVA [*in a low voice*]. Take care!

YELLOW SNAKE [*releasing her hastily*]. Your mother!

SUIVA [*half laughing, half serious*]. No. The God might see.

YELLOW SNAKE [*disgustedly*]. The God! The God! That poor old man! There's too much water in his eyes. He can't see anything.

SUIVA [*frightened*]. Take care! Take care!

YELLOW SNAKE. If I were God I wouldn't live in that dark pool. [*Approaching her*] Your hair is like the thunder-clouds! Your breath is like crushed lilies!

SUIVA [*to divert him*]. No, don't! If you were God where would you live?

YELLOW SNAKE. I'd ride that cloud. I'd take these trees for arrows and shoot them at the sun.

SUIVA. You'd kill the sun!

YELLOW SNAKE. I'd wound him, so he'd limp and give us light after the birds are in their nests.

SUIVA. If you did that, we'd swim no more by moonlight.

[*She fixes the bouquet in her dress.*]

YELLOW SNAKE. Yes, we should. Because the moon's his mate and when she hears him cry she'll come to bathe his wounds with sweet spring water, but before she comes I'll catch a gourd of blood in my two hands and bring it down to you and bathe your feet.

SUIVA. With blood?

YELLOW SNAKE. With his blood, and I'll bathe mine, too, and then, at night, we'll go and dance upon the mountain. And when our people see the light they'll think the God has struck some dead tree with his tongue. And that old hag, the priestess, Waning Moon, will say the God is angry, and she'll make Amburi give her a fat deer to burn upon the altar, [*mockingly*] to fill his nose with incense. [*Angrily*] To fill her wrinkled belly!

SUIVA. Hush!

YELLOW SNAKE. And then I'll take you to the Hidden Water!

SUIVA. That's a dream! There is no Hidden Water!

YELLOW SNAKE. No?

SUIVA. Where is it?

YELLOW SNAKE. You'll find it with the sun's fire on your feet.

SUIVA. But you've not been there.

YELLOW SNAKE. I go when I will.

SUIVA. Where is it?

YELLOW SNAKE. Over there behind Grey Mountain.

SUIVA. The blue sea lies there.

YELLOW SNAKE. It's two days' journey higher than the sea.

SUIVA. Above the tree line?

YELLOW SNAKE. Many trees are there.

SUIVA. And birds?

YELLOW SNAKE. Aie! Trees and birds, but both are strange.

SUIVA [*lying down and resting her cheek on her hand*]. Tell me! How are they strange?

YELLOW SNAKE [*seating himself, cross-legged*]. It's the white truth I tell you.

SUIVA. Are the trees of gold? And the birds like little men?

YELLOW SNAKE. The birds look like these birds but they are really dreams that choose the trees they love and nest in them. They mate like thrushes but their young are not like birds at all. Some are of stone and have carved limbs and faces, rubbed and smoothed with sand, and some are pictures made with blood on birch-bark, and some are only voices. But when they sing it is like quick water under the white moon. And you must never hurt those birds or rob their nests.

SUIVA. Why not?

YELLOW SNAKE. Because, if you hurt them, you hurt the trees. If you kill them, you kill the trees; and if you kill the trees, you have no shelter from the sun and storm; and though you live, life will be dull as sleep is without dreams; and you'll be glad to die.

SUIVA. What else is there?

YELLOW SNAKE. There is grass—like this grass, and flowers, and berry-bushes; but they have juices red as your own blood. And when they are hurt they cry as children do. And when the wind runs through them and they're glad, you hear their laughter rippling up the hills. And there's a deep lake, deeper than the sky, with water whiter than a young deer's teeth. And when you swim in it you're strong as the black otter and swift as the clean trout and sweet as the white lilies. And when you drink of it your heart is friendly and you hate no man and none hates you. And when you look on it your eyes are stars, your hair is waving grass, your arms have bark like fir trees, and your legs are like the polished stones in the creek bottom—you don't know what you are. The bees and birds come to you, the shy deer, the trees, the flowers, even the stones and fishes. You talk to them and they to you. And so the quick day passes; days and days.

SUIVA. Has any man gone with you?

YELLOW SNAKE. Not with me; but Lerii knows the way.

SUIVA. Mad Lerii!

YELLOW SNAKE. Aie!

SUIVA. That's strange.

YELLOW SNAKE. I have a house there.

SUIVA. Yellow Snake! You've made a house for us! By Hidden Water!

YELLOW SNAKE. If you will come.

SUIVA. A two days' journey? There, behind Grey Mountain?

YELLOW SNAKE. Maybe not so far.

SUIVA. One day?

YELLOW SNAKE. Maybe not one day.

SUIVA. How far? Where is it?

YELLOW SNAKE. How far can the heart leap when the dawn birds sing?

SUIVA. You haven't made a house!

YELLOW SNAKE [*with a wide gesture*]. This is my house!

SUIVA. I thought you meant it!

YELLOW SNAKE. This is my house.

SUIVA. It's no more yours than mine or any other's.

YELLOW SNAKE. A man must have no fear in his own house. He must walk straight and know the way of it. He must know the songs and plumage of all birds that nest and all the colours of all fish that swim and all the words and ways of all the beasts. He must have no fear of any beast, or man, or God. If he's afraid, then this is not his house.

SUIVA. If you won't fear the God, then I shan't love you.

YELLOW SNAKE. Why should I fear him?

SUIVA. Yellow Snake!

YELLOW SNAKE. Why should I?

SUIVA. Why? Because he's God! He gives you the sun's heat and the moon's whiteness. He drives the salmon to your traps and curves your arrow to the quick deer's heart. He puts good magic in the roots of plants and hangs red berries on the bushes. And if you fear him he will prosper you. But if you fear him not, he will strike you dead. The hills will fall on you, or he'll put poison in your mouth so that your bones will rot like fallen trees. But if you pray to him and bring him gifts and do his bidding as the priestess tells, you will be rich and warm and happy and well fed, and you will live to see the ptarmigan turn white ten times the counted fingers of both hands. Oh, you must fear him! Fear him, Yellow Snake!

YELLOW SNAKE. I can't fear him. I can't fear anything.

SUIVA. Only the God.

YELLOW SNAKE. Fat Mablo fears the God. Will you love him?

SUIVA [*slightly diverted*]. Mablo?

YELLOW SNAKE. Aie! He wants you for his woman.

SUIVA. What!

YELLOW SNAKE. I heard the priestess tell your mother so. That's why she was so happy. He's the grouse that smokes a silver pipe and has the yellow on his cheeks.

SUIVA. The Great Chief's son! And he wants me!

YELLOW SNAKE [*superbly*]. I also want you.

SUIVA. Chief of the Seven Feathers! Are you sure?

YELLOW SNAKE [*uneasily*]. But you don't want him. You want me.

SUIVA [*teasingly*]. It's no small thing to be the Great Chief's woman.

YELLOW SNAKE. Rather than mate with him I'd pick a three-years' skunk up by the tail.

SUIVA. He's not so very fat.

YELLOW SNAKE. The groundhog is a pine needle beside him.

SUIVA. Every day he prays at the God's altar.

YELLOW SNAKE. He doesn't pray. He eats the sacred meat after the God has smelt it.

SUIVA. That's a lie.

YELLOW SNAKE. I've seen him eat it.

SUIVA. How could you see him? Only the old men go within the gates—they and the Chief's son. You tell too many lies.

YELLOW SNAKE. It's not a lie. I've seen him from the top of the flat rock.

SUIVA. But that's within the gate!

YELLOW SNAKE [*sulkily*]. What of it?

SUIVA. How do you get there?

YELLOW SNAKE. There's a deep crevice in the canyon wall. A cow could climb it.

SUIVA. They'll kill you if they catch you! They'll cut your hair off and throw it in the pool. [*Pleadingly*] No! No! You're lying to me! Tell me you've not been there.

YELLOW SNAKE. I say that Mablo eats the God's

meat. He's a sly groundhog with an oily tongue. He only loves his belly.

SUIVA. You've not been there at all. You say these things because you're jealous of him.

YELLOW SNAKE. Jealous? No, I'm not!

SUIVA. You're only a singer, but he's the Great Chief's son.

YELLOW SNAKE. I don't care if he is.

SUIVA. He has a fine house, too, and lots of cattle.

YELLOW SNAKE. I don't care if he has.

SUIVA [*with a purpose*]. I do!

YELLOW SNAKE [*startled*]. Eh?

SUIVA [*defiantly*]. I say I care.

YELLOW SNAKE. You wouldn't marry him?

SUIVA [*rising*]. Maybe not.

YELLOW SNAKE. Maybe! You couldn't marry him!

SUIVA. My mother's old and we are poor. The winter's coming, we must have a house; and we must live.

YELLOW SNAKE [*springing up*]. Then, you will be his woman? You! Suiva, it's not so? Tell me it's not so!

SUIVA. It will be if I choose.

YELLOW SNAKE. I'll kill you first!

SUIVA. Mablo's a man! He won't let you kill me!

YELLOW SNAKE. He's not a man! He's a round pot of bear's grease! And if you mate with him I'll kill you both! [*In agony*] You wouldn't mate with him!

SUIVA. When Mablo asks me, I'll say this to him: If Yellow Snake has not made me a house by the young moon, then I will mate with you.

YELLOW SNAKE [*wildly*]. How can I make a house by the young moon?

SUIVA. By working hard, you will make it.

YELLOW SNAKE. The moon is half way here!

SUIVA. Get Shiny Bird and Blue Fox to help you.

YELLOW SNAKE. Yes! Yes, and while they work I'll sing to them.

SUIVA. You must work, too.

YELLOW SNAKE [*cunningly*]. I know a place in the thick cedar woods where the close branches are like sloping walls. The ground's so thick with moss it springs like muskeg. There's a place to sleep! Why must we have a house?

SUIVA [*gently*]. When the birds mate, why do they build them nests?

YELLOW SNAKE [*after a pause*]. That's so.

SUIVA [*drawing him down*]. Sit down beside me and we'll make the plan.

YELLOW SNAKE. But tell me first you wouldn't mate with him.

SUIVA. I'll tell you nothing till the young moon comes. Give me that stick there! [*He hands her a dry stick which she tries vainly to break, then returns it to him.*] You break it in four pieces; two long, like that; and two short, like this. [*He does so, returns them to her, and gradually becomes interested as she arranges them on the sandy ground. She hands him back one of the smaller pieces.*] Now, break this one again, and we'll make the door. [*He breaks it, hands her the pieces, and sits down beside her. She arranges the fourth wall.*] The door must face the sunrise.

YELLOW SNAKE. We'll build it on the night side of the stream.

SUIVA. I know a hollow where the ground is smooth.

YELLOW SNAKE. So do I.

SUIVA. Below the traps?

YELLOW SNAKE. Not far. There's a young juniper with one arm in the stream.

SUIVA. And three flat stones to step on?

YELLOW SNAKE. Aie!

SUIVA [*clapping her hands*]. That's my place, too!

YELLOW SNAKE. I thought so. Now, let's make the walls.

SUIVA. The inside first. Where shall we have the fire?

YELLOW SNAKE. Here, in this corner.
SUIVA [*nodding*]. Yes.
YELLOW SNAKE. We'll lay the fire-stones.

[*They arrange some small stones in the form of an oven.*]

SUIVA. Where shall we sleep?
YELLOW SNAKE. On this side, with our feet this way, so we can see the stars.

[SUIVA *lays some grass in the place indicated.*]

SUIVA. Here are the cedar boughs.

[YELLOW SNAKE *adds some leaves.*]

YELLOW SNAKE. And here are deerskins. Now, we'll make the walls.

[*They build a framework of dry sticks.*]

SUIVA. These are white birches.
YELLOW SNAKE. Yes. They gleam like silver. The light on them is like the moon on water.
SUIVA. And they are strong. They don't rot like pine saplings do.
YELLOW SNAKE. We'll chink them with grey moss that's warm in winter.

[*The corner posts of the house are forked, and in these forks they set the joists. Across the joists they lay rafters, and cover the house with a litter of leaves and pine needles.*]

SUIVA. We'll thatch the roof with rushes from the black swamp.
YELLOW SNAKE. And bind the rushes with thin willow boughs.

[*They add a few finishing touches.*]

SUIVA. And there's our home.

YELLOW SNAKE [*his hand on hers*]. With sunlight in the door.

SUIVA [*rather shyly, taking his hand*]. In our own house it will be well with us. [*The cracking of a branch is heard. They spring up.* SUIVA *laughs.*] It's mother!

YELLOW SNAKE [*preparing to clear out*]. I fear no man, nor beast, nor God; but I fear her!

SUIVA. Quick! Where's the water pot! [*He picks up an earthenware pot.*] She hasn't seen us! Quick! Down to the spring!

[*Hand in hand, they run off to the right.* KOTWI *comes in from the left, grunting. She glances at the cold fire stones, looks in vain for the pot, and then calls, angrily.*]

KOTWI. Suiva! Suiva! [*There is no reply. She catches sight of the toy house and inspects it closely with growing indignation. There is the sound of approaching steps from the right. She turns to scold her daughter but discovers* AMBURI, *the old Chief, and his son,* MABLO. *They enter.* AMBURI *is a dignified, courtly, old man, accustomed to grant favours and command respect. He is dressed in black otter skins and carries an ornamented hatchet in his girdle. He wears mocassins and deerskin leggings.* MABLO *is a fat unctuous youth in brown bearskins.* KOTWI, *her expression changed to one of gratified surprise, goes forward to meet them.*] The Great Chief and his son, Mablo, do me much honour.

AMBURI [*graciously*]. Your man was a good man, and we respect you.

MABLO [*wiping his hands on his costume*]. There is no woman whom we honour more.

KOTWI. Will the Great Chief be seated?

AMBURI. Aie!

KOTWI. And the Chief's son?

AMBURI [*calmly*]. The Chief's son will stand. Stand over there. . . . What think you of him, Kotwi?

KOTWI. He is most handsome. His legs are like great tree trunks. He has the courage of a mother-bear, and yet his ways are gentle.

MABLO. That is so.

AMBURI [*sharply*]. Let be!

KOTWI. He fears the God and doesn't run with fast girls.

AMBURI. It's true he fears the God.

MABLO [*unctuously*]. The God is good to them that fear him.

AMBURI. Say on, my son. Tell Kotwi why we've come.

MABLO. You tell her, father.

AMBURI. My son has found your daughter to his liking.

KOTWI. My Suiva?

AMBURI. Aie! And he asks your leave to marry her.

KOTWI. So great an honour I'd not dared to dream of!

AMBURI. You say well.

KOTWI. She is a good girl, though, and fit to mate him.

AMBURI. Fears she the God?

KOTWI. Like thunder on the mountain. And I have taught her many things besides. She can sew double stitch with strong deer tendons and weave a blanket soft and white as snow. She can make baskets, too, that hold spring water, and smooth an arrow like stream-polished stones. And she is cunning to set snares for rabbits; and in the smoking sheds and at the traps no girl works harder.

MABLO. Can she cook?

KOTWI. Cook! When you eat deer meat as she cooks it, you'll think you never ate deer meat before. And a bear's heart! Or a blue grouse! Or a young trout! When she grills young trout I wonder that the God comes not from heaven to eat them!

MABLO. Does she wrap parsley round the fat bear's heart? Or does she cook it with wild spinach leaves?

KOTWI. She studs it with fine pellets of burnt grain and steeps it over night in berry wine, and wraps wet leaves round it, and cooks it in the ashes of green wood. For that alone a man might marry her!

AMBURI [*to* MABLO]. Your belly will be glad, but life's not all big eating. [*To* KOTWI] Where is your girl? Is she not up yet?

KOTWI. She said her sun-prayer ere the sun was up!

AMBURI. Where is she, then?

KOTWI. She must have gone to the far spring for water. I'll call her to come quickly. [*Calling*] Oh, Suiva! Suiva! Come you here! I want you!

AMBURI [*rising*]. Now that he has your leave he'll speak to her. Find your tongue, my son.

MABLO. Yes, father.

KOTWI. My girl will take you in her arms. Don't be too backward, Mablo.

AMBURI. Remember you're the Great Chief's son, and we have many cattle.

KOTWI. Think of the fat bear's heart!

MABLO. I needn't think of those things. I want Suiva.

KOTWI. She'll be the proud girl, or she's not my daughter!

AMBURI. We'll leave him to the asking. But I doubt not she'll have him.

KOTWI. She'll be his clinging vine or I'm a liar.

AMBURI. I have some things to say to you.

KOTWI. Great Chief!

AMBURI. We'll go along the lake path. [*They go towards the left,* AMBURI *leading.*] I hear your cattle have been stolen?

KOTWI. Aie! Most are gone! Now that my man is dead!

AMBURI. I know who stole them. He shall be killed, and you shall have his herd to graze with yours. He

was a fool to steal the cattle of the Chief's grandchildren.

KOTWI. The God is great. He giveth us full bellies!

[*They go out left.* MABLO *makes some slight adjustments in his costume, slicks his hair, etc., and strolls over to the fore-right of the scene.* SUIVA *runs in from the rear right and, for a moment, fails to see him.*]

SUIVA. Here I am, mother! What made you call so loud? [*She pauses for an answer, then turns and discovers* MABLO.] Oh!

MABLO. Good morning, Suiva!

SUIVA [*dimpling*]. Good morning, Mablo. I didn't know you were here!

MABLO. I came with father.

SUIVA [*encouragingly*]. Yes?

MABLO. He's gone with your mother to walk along the lake path.

SUIVA. What gets you up so early?

MABLO. I never miss the sun-prayer. Afterwards I sleep. Did you make this little house?

[*He makes as if to stir it with his foot.*]

SUIVA [*swiftly*]. Yes, but please don't touch it!

MABLO. You should have a fence around it to keep out the cattle.

SUIVA. We don't need a fence. We have no cattle.

MABLO. That's what your mother said. It's not so with us. We have more cattle than three men can count.

SUIVA [*baiting him*]. It must be wonderful to be so rich. Always to know that you can kill a beast and have fresh meat.

MABLO. And one-tenth part of all the game that's caught and all the fish.

SUIVA. And a big house!

MABLO. With two doors and a cooking spit that turns a whole great haunch of deer.

SUIVA. And haven't you a grizzly skin to lie on, with brown-gray hair that's deeper than the bunch grass?

MABLO [*nodding*]. And I have anklets for the girl I marry.

SUIVA. How many anklets have you?

MABLO. They would go, all gold and silver, to your knee, and be some over for the other leg!

SUIVA. Imagine having anklets to your knees! She'll be a lucky girl, the one you marry!

MABLO. Aie! And pretty soon I'll choose her.

SUIVA. Does she know?

MABLO. Not yet.

SUIVA. When will you tell her?

MABLO. Do you think she'd like to know?

SUIVA. I'm sure she would.

MABLO. I'll tell her then. It's you!

SUIVA. I?

MABLO. I am not joking. You're the girl.

SUIVA. Oh, Mablo!

MABLO. And you will love me?

SUIVA. Mablo . . . Mablo . . . you tell me this so quickly. You have not courted me. I would blush to tell you so soon that I will love you.

MABLO [*coyly*]. I won't look at you when you say it.

SUIVA. I would feel shame to tell you quite so soon! [*She stoops quickly and picks up a leafy branch about six feet in length.*] But I'll show you, Mablo. If you catch me before I strip this branch, then I shall love you well and be your woman.

MABLO. That's a child's game! I'd rather have you tell me.

SUIVA. Two leaves are gone!

MABLO. Don't be too quick. I have had no breakfast yet.

[*He runs at her and she pokes the end of the branch in his face. He stops abruptly, and she strips off a few more leaves.*]

SUIVA. You should run lightly for not having eaten. [*He makes a sudden dive for her. She eludes him lightly.*] If I were a fat cow, then you'd have caught me! [*She strips off a few more leaves.*]

MABLO. If I don't catch you then, maybe to-morrow you will tell me?

SUIVA. If you don't catch me I won't mate with you.

MABLO. You don't mean that.

SUIVA. As sure as these leaves fall.

[*He sets about the pursuit in earnest, but without success. They go in and out between the trees.*]

MABLO. There are other girls.

SUIVA. Then why chase me, and lose your breath?

MABLO. I want you. I will have you!

SUIVA. If you could run like Yellow Snake you'd catch me! [*He doubles at her around a tree.*] Oh, no, you don't! You are not cunning either! The leaves are falling fast. You must make haste! Be more like Yellow Snake; he'd catch me ere the falling of one leaf!

MABLO. He has no cattle!

SUIVA. He'll make a song of how the groundhog chased the squirrel.

MABLO. He has no house.

SUIVA. He'll have one by the coming of the moon! And I'll go mate with him unless you catch me! So catch me quick, my Mablo! Catch me! Catch me! [*She whips his legs. He yells and pursues. In his course, he comes near to destroying the toy house.*] Be careful! That's the little house we made! And Yellow Snake will make a big one like it! And I'll live there with him until I die! [*She has stripped all the leaves from the branch save a few at the top; these, she breaks off and throws in his face.*] And you can eat your anklets, you fat Mablo. [*She whips him soundly about the legs.*] Or hang them on the horns of

an old cow! [*She whips him again.* MABLO *squeals.*] For Yellow Snake's my mate, you sleepy Mablo! So, don't come here again to make me laugh!

[*She throws the whip at him and runs out to the right. He is in a state of smarting fury and impotent shame. First, he starts after her, then, hesitates, turns, and catching sight of the toy house, runs at it, and kicks it with all his might. His bare toes go through the edifice but encounter the fire-stones. With a howl of pain he clutches the bruised foot and dances on the other.* WANING MOON *enters from the right.* MABLO *dances up to her.*]

MABLO. What think you, Waning Moon! She will not have me! She beat my legs with a young birch tree! And she's run off to mate with Yellow Snake.

WANING MOON. She will not have you!

MABLO. And she will mate with him.

WANING MOON. The God has made her mad. She is no woman for the Great Chief's son. Go ask old Coyote's girl. She is more proper and she has many cattle.

MABLO. I don't want his cattle or his daughter. I want Suiva.

WANING MOON. And she wants Yellow Snake. What can you do?

MABLO. He shall not have her!

WANING MOON. You must kill him then! But he is strong and cunning as the cougar! Aie! Stronger! For he stripped the yellow beast to get the skin he wears. And if you tackle him he'll kill you, Mablo.

MABLO. I didn't say I'd kill *him.*

WANING MOON. If you kill her the tribe will have your blood. You dare not do it!

MABLO. I don't want her dead. I want her living.

WANING MOON. Then you must poison him. I'll tell

you how. Dip a sharp cactus in a boiling of snakes' tongues and hide it in his bed. When the thorns prick him he will die and none shall know who killed him. If any man suspect, I'll say that the God did it because he would not fear him.

MABLO. It will be worse for him to live and not to have her.

WANING MOON. How can that be? If he's alive he'll have her.

MABLO. She fears the God. Make her his virgin priestess. And if he goes within the gate the tribe will kill him.

WANING MOON. How will that help you?

MABLO. The Chief's son goes within the gate.

WANING MOON. Sly fox! Give me ten cows and I will choose her!

MABLO. I will give you five.

WANING MOON. Ten!

MABLO. Seven!

WANING MOON. Remember how she whipped you!

MABLO. Eight! Eight, and no more!

WANING MOON. Listen, Mablo. When your father dies you will be the Chief and it is known that the Great Chief has power over the priestess. If you want her then, no man can stop you. Give me ten cows!

MABLO. When will you choose her?

WANING MOON. Now. I hear her coming! [*In a whisper*] Promise me. Ten cows!

MABLO. Aie! You shall have them, but there's someone with her. Come this way! We'll watch them.

[*They take shelter behind the rock to the right where they are visible to the audience but hidden from* SUIVA *and* YELLOW SNAKE, *who enter from the rear-right, carrying between them a pot of water.*]

YELLOW SNAKE. I wish I'd seen you whip him with the birch tree.

SUIVA. He danced like a fat bear and squealed like a stuck rabbit.

[*They put down the water pot.* YELLOW SNAKE *discovers the remains of the toy house and and indicates it to* SUIVA.]

YELLOW SNAKE. Look!

SUIVA. Our house!

YELLOW SNAKE. It's all in ruins!

SUIVA. He did it out of spite. It doesn't matter. It will be well with us in our own house.

[*She takes his hand rather shyly.*]

YELLOW SNAKE [*with a repetition of his previous wide gesture*]. Aie! And in my house it will be well with us. If I live like the robin in his nest will you not go with me as white gulls go?

SUIVA [*nodding*]. To the high mountains where the great bears are.

YELLOW SNAKE. And to the Hidden Water?

SUIVA. When you have put the sun's fire on my feet.

YELLOW SNAKE. And you'll not harm the birds or rob their nests?

SUIVA. If I should hurt your dreams, then I'd hurt you. If I should kill your dreams then I'd kill you. And I love you.

[*They draw closer together.*]

YELLOW SNAKE. As I love you, as the white moon looks down on her own face.

SUIVA. In the deep lake that's whiter than a young deer's teeth.

YELLOW SNAKE. We shall swim there together and be strong.

SUIVA. And drink of it, so that we hate no man, and none hates us.

YELLOW SNAKE. I'll start to-day to cut the thin birch saplings.

SUIVA. And when the young moon comes . . .
YELLOW SNAKE. And when it comes . . .

[WANING MOON, *directed by* MABLO, *has unpinned the silver moon from her vestment. Holding it behind her, she goes to meet the lovers who are about to embrace.*]

WANING MOON. Suiva!

[*They spring apart. She advances.*]

SUIVA. Holy One! What brings you here?
WANING MOON. I have a gift for you.
SUIVA. A gift?
WANING MOON. Come nearer. Kneel. The God has spoken. The young moon is yours.

[*With a deft movement she fixes the silver moon on* SUIVA'S *tunic, then turns swiftly to encounter* YELLOW SNAKE, *who has sprung forward. He pauses before her outstretched arms.* MABLO *grins from his hiding place as the curtain falls.*]

ACT II

The scene represents a rocky canyon and is divided from left to right by a deep chasm at the bottom of which is a swift stream. The chasm is spanned by a huge, hideous stone image of the God of Gods. At the feet of the image, in an iron basket is a fire of pine bark. Beside the fire are a pot of meat scraps, a cup of wine and a sacrificial knife. The altar is approached by three stone steps; below, the torrent thrashes into the deep pool; beside it, at the right, is a pile of pine bark.

To the left, well forward, is a high, flat-topped rock which is reached by descending a natural crevice of the cliff behind it. To the right is a sheer cliff, pierced by a cavern with a door-like opening. The background shows only the scarred face of a cliff tufted with ferns and stunted pine trees.

The right and left entrances are around the forward ends of the cliffs.

It is sunset of the same day. As the curtain rises, WANING MOON *is discovered grilling a chop over the sacred fire;* MABLO, *resembling a fat poodle, sits on the altar step waiting for it to be finished;* LERII, *a mad old beggar, dressed in disreputable rabbit skins, is squatting on the ground to the right of the altar, and peering into the deep pool.*

MABLO. I'm hungry, Waning Moon.

WANING MOON [*exhibiting the chop*]. It's almost done.

MABLO. Don't burn it.

WANING MOON. Huh! You'll get no meat from Suiva, red or black.

MABLO. By and by, I will.

WANING MOON [*indicating* LERII]. If you go mad like Lerii! She says she will feed no other with the God's meat.

MABLO. Wait and see. [*He lowers his voice and glances towards the cavern.*] She can't hear us, can she?

WANING MOON. No. She's at the farther end putting on her white dress.

MABLO [*grinning*]. We didn't lose much time.

WANING MOON. Even her mother hasn't seen her since.

MABLO. Or Yellow Snake!

WANING MOON. He's standing by the gate.

MABLO. He'll come no further. This is her house and mine.

WANING MOON. Don't be too rash. Your father is a just man, Mablo.

MABLO. I said nothing.

WANING MOON. He'd strike you quickly as he would a stranger.

MABLO. But I said nothing. Isn't the meat done?

WANING MOON [*inspecting the chop*]. Aie! It's as he likes it. [*She holds it under the nose of the image and intones in a whining voice.*] Great God, this is the five-pronged buck you sent; this is his body. Shiny Bird killed him with a flinty spear and sends you his body to devour that you may send more deer to Shiny Bird. He fears you, God. Set more deer in his path!

[*This formality over, she is about to hand the chop to* MABLO *when* LERII *suddenly demands it.*]

LERII. Meat!

WANING MOON. You've had a bone, mad Lerii.

MABLO [*impatiently*]. It's getting cold. Don't mind him.

[*She hands* MABLO *the chop which he devours gluttonously.*]

LERII. I want meat.

WANING MOON. Don't bother me. Go back and look for pictures.

LERII. I've watched the pool all day. I am tired of watching the pool, and now the shadow's on it.

WANING MOON. It was almost dark when you saw Pantherhead fall from the pointed rock.

MABLO [*with his mouth full*]. And three days later he did fall.

LERII. Of course, he fell. I saw him. His face was torn and all his bones were broken.

MABLO. How did he come to fall?

LERII. He put his whole weight on a rotten tree. When you found him there was a dead branch in his hand.

MABLO. Who told you that?

LERII. I saw it in the pool.

MABLO [*to* WANING MOON]. There was a dead branch in his hand.

LERII. He held so tight, you had to twist it from his hand . . . . like this!

MABLO [*gasping*]. That's so.

LERII. And then you gathered up his arrows and put them in your belt. The bow was broken but you took the bow-string.

MABLO [*uncomfortably*]. I gave them to his woman.

LERII. That may be. I only saw what happened at the rock.

MABLO [*to* WANING MOON]. Do you think he does see pictures in the pool?

WANING MOON [*non-committally*]. Who knows? The God has touched him.

MABLO. He tried to show me one the other day. I couldn't see it.

LERII [*turning*]. It was there.

MABLO. I couldn't see it.

LERII [*shrugging*]. The belly has no eyes.

[MABLO *is put out of countenance;* WANING MOON *is shocked at this affront to the Chief's son.*]

WANING MOON [*sharply*]. Go to your place, mad Lerii!

[LERII, *completely shattered by her tone, slinks to the edge of the pool and sits down.*]

MABLO. Where's the wine?

[WANING MOON *passes him the wine-cup.*]

WANING MOON. Don't let her see you!

[*He glances at the cavern, turns his back to it, and drinks.*]

MABLO [*returning the cup*]. It's a good wine. Who made it?

WANING MOON. Coyote's girl. [*She inspects the contents.*] You don't leave much. No matter. I'll have to fill it for the rites.

MABLO. Does Suiva drink it at the rites?

WANING MOON. Not likely. At the rites, she wets the God's lips with it.

MABLO. Does the tribe know she will take the vows to-night?

WANING MOON. Aie! They know! Already they show me less respect. As I came in, more than a score were gathered at the gate and many did not greet me. But you will see them fawn to Suiva's hand! Until she gives her place up to another. It's the God's priestess, not the maid, they care for! Filthy dogs!

MABLO. You've had a good life, Old Moon.

WANING MOON. Well, that's true. In all these years I have never once been hungry and never once gone sober to my bed.

MABLO. You've got no cause to grumble. [*He gets up, and hands her the bone.*] Here's the bone. The God might like it.

WANING MOON [*taking it*]. Aie! He's fond of bones. [*She lays it deftly among the flames of the brazier.*] The fire is low; give me some pine bark. [MABLO *gives her some bark which she lays on the fire.*] Now, take the cup. I'll fill it from the goatskin.

MABLO. Can't I stay?

WANING MOON [*coming down from the altar*]. You'll come in with the others.

MABLO. I'd like to see her now.

WANING MOON. You had better wait. You'll see her at the rites and afterwards as often as you like. [*They go towards the left entrance.* WANING MOON *turns and calls*] Oh, Suiva!

SUIVA [*off*]. Yes?

WANING MOON. Your mother's at the gate. I'll send her in. [*In a lower tone*] Come, Mablo!

[MABLO, *who has been trying to peer into the cavern, shakes himself, and follows her out to the left. As they disappear,* SUIVA *comes from the cavern. She wears a long white vestment, and, at her breast, a silver moon. She goes to the altar, makes obeisance to the image, and then, after a hesitating pause, directs her attention to the flat-topped rock, the place which* YELLOW SNAKE *professed to have visited.* LERII, *whom she had not seen, gets up and approaches her from behind. He watches her a moment before speaking.*]

LERII. He isn't there.

SUIVA [*startled*]. Mad Lerii! You frightened me! I . . . . I thought I saw an eagle.

LERII. You saw no eagle for his wing is broken. He'll flap his wings no more in the sun's face. [*He*

indicates the image.] He is the happy one. He has no wings.

SUIVA. Poor Lerii!

LERII. He has a stone heart. He will live forever.

SUIVA. When you fell into the pool it was his hand that saved you.

LERII [*going to the edge of the pool*]. When I fell in the pool I looked for him. I looked in the green cavern. I looked in the white tent. He wasn't there.

SUIVA [*joining him by the pool*]. And while you looked he had you by the hair. He pulled you from the whirlpool and threw you on the sandbar.

LERII. It was a log I held to.

SUIVA. Poor Lerii.

LERII [*spitting in the pool*]. Bah!

SUIVA. You mustn't do that!

LERII [*suddenly*]. Look!

SUIVA. What?

LERII [*pointing in the pool*]. A picture!

SUIVA. Where?

LERII. By the black rock. No, no! Don't look!

SUIVA. I see no picture.

LERII. Now it's gone.

SUIVA. What was it, Lerii?

LERII. Nothing.

SUIVA. What?

LERII. The God is hungry.

SUIVA. I'll feed him by and by.

LERII. Aie! You'll feed him by and by.

SUIVA [*vaguely disturbed*]. What was the picture?

LERII. Never mind, you'll see. [*A slight pause*] But you'd do better if you ran away. [KOTWI *enters from the left and overhears this speech.*]

KOTWI. What's that you are saying!

[SUIVA *runs to her and takes her in her arms.* LERII *gets up and grins idiotically.*]

SUIVA. Mother!

KOTWI [*importantly*]. I've come to see my daughter, the new priestess. You go away, mad Lerii.

LERII. Ask me the question first.

KOTWI. Not here, at the God's altar!

LERII. Then, I won't go.

KOTWI. If I ask it once, then will you go?

LERII. Ask and find out.

SUIVA. Yes, ask it, mother. There's no harm.

KOTWI. What does the God know, Lerii?

LERII. The God knows nothing, even less than you know. [*Chuckling insanely, he goes out right.*]

SUIVA. Poor Lerii!

KOTWI. When he fell in the pool he saw the God, and those who see the God go surely mad.

SUIVA. He says he didn't see the God.

KOTWI. That proves he's mad. And if he's mad he must have seen the God. Now, let me look at you!

SUIVA. Do you like my new dress?

KOTWI. Stand off a little. [SUIVA *does so.*] Now, turn around. [SUIVA *turns slowly.*] It's not quite even. Let me catch it up. [*She takes a fishbone from her own costume and adjusts the skirt to her liking, then stands off and inspects her again.*] There! it's beautiful. When the girls see you they'll turn inside out! [*She approaches her again.*] May I lay my hand on the young moon?

SUIVA. I'll ask the Holy One.

KOTWI. Tut, child, I'm your own mother! [*She fingers the silver crescent.*] Aie! It's cold and heavy. But they say to touch it cures the belly ache.

SUIVA. Have you the belly ache?

KOTWI. No. And it's not much belly ache I'll have with no big girl to catch me grouse and rabbits. Didn't Mablo want you for his woman?

SUIVA. Yes.

KOTWI. And you wouldn't have him?

SUIVA. No.

KOTWI. Why not?

SUIVA. I couldn't, mother, I love Yellow Snake.

KOTWI. That's a poor reason to refuse the Great Chief's son.

SUIVA. Have you seen Yellow Snake since I came here?

KOTWI. He's standing by the gate with his long bow and arrow. All the old women are laughing at him. They bid him sing you out of the God's temple. They call him lazy lie-a-bed.

SUIVA. What does he say to them?

KOTWI. He says no word.

SUIVA. Why is he armed?

KOTWI [*shrugging*]. To shoot the sun, maybe.

SUIVA. Did he say that?

KOTWI. I said it.

SUIVA. So did he. He said he'd shoot the sun and catch a gourd of blood in his two hands and bring it down to me and bathe my feet.

KOTWI. He is a worthless singer of mad songs.

SUIVA. In all the mountains of the world there is no man like him.

KOTWI. It's a good thing, my girl, that the God chose you, but, for my sake, I wish you'd married Mablo. If you'd said "yes" to him, Amburi would have got me back my cattle. And now he will not. How am I to live?

SUIVA. I wonder why he chose me.

KOTWI. So do I. Old Waning Moon's a sly one. You don't know where you're at with that old grey-bird.

SUIVA. Mother!

KOTWI. You've been a good girl, though, I'll say that for you.

SUIVA. When I was no higher than your knee, you taught me fear of him. And every day I've said my prayers at sunrise and at sunset. All my life I've feared him. I think that's why he chose me.

KOTWI. Partly for that, and partly, too, because we lost our cattle. He knows we're poor and that I am old. Maybe he'll whisper in your ear to feed your poor old mother twice a day.

SUIVA. If he does, I'll run and tell you!

KOTWI. Aie! And you'd best run fast. Or maybe I'll be dead of hunger before you get there. [*Whiningly*] You won't forget your poor old mother, Suiva?

SUIVA. Of course not, mother.

KOTWI. There's my own Suiva. I knew that's what you'd say. Where do they keep the meat?

SUIVA [*distastefully*]. I don't know, mother.

KOTWI. No matter! No matter! We'll find out by and by! It is a fine thing to be the God's own daughter. A virgin priestess has great power for good. Pray him to slay our enemies and make their women barren.

SUIVA. Yes.

KOTWI. And when a deer is killed or a black bear comes or ducks or turtles come, remember that the God must have his share. If any man retain the whole of any bird or beast, the tribe will die of scurvy. Tell them that!

SUIVA. I'll tell them. And I'll pray that Yellow Snake may learn to fear the God so that he'll live to be your age and mine together . . . . Mother!

KOTWI. Yes?

SUIVA. You'll see him as you go out by the gate.

KOTWI. Aie!

SUIVA. Go up to him and whisper in his ear.

KOTWI. I will not. I have no word to say to that young man.

SUIVA. Give him a message from me.

KOTWI. What is it?

SUIVA. Tell him that I love him; that I'll love him all my life. But he must go away and never try to see me any more.

KOTWI. I'll tell him the last part.

SUIVA. No, tell him all. If you do that for me, there is nothing I won't do for you.

KOTWI. Well, I see no harm. And you'll be good to me, I know you will. I'll tell him, Suiva.

[WANING MOON *enters from the left, carrying a jug of oil and a cup of wine.*]

SUIVA [*whispering*]. Tell him now, mother, now, before the rites begin.

[SUIVA *goes to the altar and kneels on the stone steps, facing the image.* KOTWI *meets* WANING MOON *at the left entrance.*]

KOTWI. Old Moon!

WANING MOON. Yes?

[KOTWI *draws her aside to the left.*]

KOTWI. What made you choose her?

WANING MOON. Have you forgotten the five cows you promised?

KOTWI. So? It was my cows that did it. I said three, not five.

WANING MOON. It was five you said. If you go back on it I'll send her home. [*Indicating the God*] She's not his daughter yet.

KOTWI. All right! All right! I only hope I get the worth of them.

WANING MOON. That's your look out. Where are you going?

KOTWI. Only to the gate.

WANING MOON. Come when you hear the goat drums and tell the old women not to talk too much. The God dislikes their chatter. [KOTWI *goes out laughing.* WANING MOON *watches her with amused triumph; then approaches* SUIVA.] Young Moon, the time is near.

SUIVA [*rising*]. Yes, Holy One.

WANING MOON. All the old men and women are gathered at the gate. Here, take the wine cup. [SUIVA *takes it.*] Lay it at his feet. [*She does so.*] That's right. And here's the oil to light you on your way. [*She hands* SUIVA *the jug of oil.*] Put it on this side of the fire, where I can reach it without crossing over. [SUIVA *places it to the right of the fire basket.*] So. And now what else is there?

SUIVA. The twining of white blossoms.

WANING MOON. I put it by the pine bark. [*She goes to the right of the altar and picks up a chaplet of white blossoms and green leaves.*] When you have spoken the last word I'll place this on your head. You wear it as you walk backwards to the cavern. [*She holds it up.*] It's not until this crown is on your head that you're the God's own daughter. But when this touches you, your life is his.

SUIVA. Yes, Holy One.

WANING MOON. You'll tend his fire until you're old as I am. And if any man come near you, he will be killed. If you seek out any man to love him you will be killed.

SUIVA. I'll seek no man and none shall come to me.

WANING MOON [*indicating the image*]. Do you know his ways ?

SUIVA. Only what mother taught me.

WANING MOON. How did he make the hills?

SUIVA. By breathing on the clouds he made them hard. And with his right hand he set them on the earth.

WANING MOON. Where does he live?

SUIVA. He has two houses—one in the deep pool, the other in a land beyond the sea.

WANING MOON. We know this house. Tell me about the other.

SUIVA. The other house is a great Yellow Tent, higher than any mountain and ten times wider than

the eye can see. Inside the tent are springs of water, and sweet berry wine, and herds of antelope, and flocks of fat, white ducks. Yes, and all other birds and beasts we hunt against our hunger. But there we do not hunt. When we are hungry they come and fall upon our spears. And all the stones are hot with hidden fire so that to roast our meat we have but to lay it on the nearest stone. And when we are fed we dance in many circles, the Great Chiefs in the centre, and then, the priestess, and then, in wider circles, all who have feared the God and done his will.

WANING MOON. How do we get there?

SUIVA. When a man dies his spirit perches like a bird on a fir tree above his grave. At the last moon, the great God gathers all these spirits in his hands, and those who feared him not, he crushes and they live no more. But those who fear him he gathers to his breast and takes with him to his great Yellow Tent beyond the sea.

WANING MOON. You know already something of his ways but you have much to learn. How does he make his will known to the tribe?

SUIVA. He speaks his wishes in the priestess' ear and she proclaims them to the people.

WANING MOON. And if the people disobey his will?

SUIVA. Then his great eyes grow red like burning logs. And all the tribe fall down before him and no man dare move until the fire has vanished from his eyes. And then they bring him gifts and do his bidding as the priestess tells, else he will strike them down as leaves in autumn.

WANING MOON. Do you believe all that?

SUIVA. I know it's true.

WANING MOON. And are you glad he chose you?

SUIVA [*after a slight pause*]. I fear him and I'm glad to do his will.

WANING MOON. His priestess must not fear him overmuch.

SUIVA. Holy One!

WANING MOON. Only as a daughter fears her father. Not as the common people fear the God. If you fear him too much you can't help him.

SUIVA. How can I help him?

WANING MOON. He's very old and sometimes he forgets the kind of meat or fish he likes the best. Then you must tell the people what you think he likes. And often when he's drunk and cannot speak you must speak for him as seems best to you. If we need rain, the tribe must bring gifts; and they must bring more gifts till the rain comes. And when the rain does come, they must bring him still more gifts in that he heard their prayer and sent the rain. It's the same thing with floods or fire or cattle sickness. I'll tell you more of these things by and by. But now you must make ready for the rites. Your hair is too tightly bound.

SUIVA. I'll loosen it.

WANING MOON. Do you remember all the words to say?

SUIVA. I think so.

WANING MOON. At the last, when I ask you if you renounce all men to serve the God, what answer do you make?

SUIVA [*raising her right hand*]. I renounce all men, all love, all hope of home and children. I shall serve him now, all days and nights, all summers and winters, till I'm old as the Old Moon. I swear it by his hand.

WANING MOON. That's right. Now, come into the cavern and I'll unbraid your hair and sprinkle you with sweet oil.

SUIVA. Then may I pray the God to make me speak with a clear voice?

WANING MOON. Aie! You can pray until the people come.

[*They go into the cavern.* YELLOW SNAKE *is seen climbing down the rock chimney to the left. The descent is slow and hazardous but finally he reaches the grass-tufted top of the flat rock. Here he stands for a moment peering downward, then descends the remaining ten feet to the level of the stage. He prowls about in search of* SUIVA, *lingering for a moment by the cavern mouth. The voices of the two women are suddenly heard. He retreats swiftly to the altar. The voices grow louder. He climbs the altar steps and takes refuge behind the image of the God.* SUIVA, *with hair unbound, comes slowly from the cavern, advances to the centre of the scene, pauses for a moment, looking at the top of the flat rock, then proceeds to the altar and kneels on the first step.*]

SUIVA. Great God whom I have feared, now make me strong; strong to endure thy will; strong to forget my love.

YELLOW SNAKE [*unseen*]. The ferns grow tall and deep beyond the ranges. The grass is green and heavy with the rain. I'll make my love a tent of leaning silver with birches whiter than the white moon stream. I'll make my love a bow that's straight and slender, with arrows plumed and fitted to her hand. I'll make my love a bed of sleeping cedar and lay a yellow fawn-skin at her feet.

My love is like the lark that sings to waking, and like the thrush that sings the leaves to sleep. My love is all the sun-time and the star-time. My love is waking and my love is sleep.

[*He steps from behind the altar and comes to meet* SUIVA.]

SUIVA. Yellow Snake!

YELLOW SNAKE [*with hands extended*]. I have come for you.

SUIVA. You mustn't!

YELLOW SNAKE. Suiva!

SUIVA. No. The God!

YELLOW SNAKE. But you're my mate.

SUIVA. I'm the God's daughter.

YELLOW SNAKE. That stone thing isn't God.

SUIVA [*in terror*]. Yellow Snake!

YELLOW SNAKE. How can that stone be God?

SUIVA. He'll strike you.

YELLOW SNAKE. Strike me? That! I'll show you! Then, you'll come.

[*He picks up a stick and mounts the altar.*]

SUIVA. He'll make you mad!

YELLOW SNAKE [*menacing the image*]. Show now if if you are God, and hold my hand!

SUIVA. He'll kill you!

[YELLOW SNAKE *strikes the image and throws away the stick.*]

YELLOW SNAKE. I struck you, God. Now, strike me! Kill me, God!

SUIVA. Don't kill him, God, don't kill him! Make him mad!

YELLOW SNAKE [*coming down from the altar*]. Suiva!

SUIVA. Spare him as you spared Lerii! Make him mad!

YELLOW SNAKE. Would you lay madness on me?

SUIVA. He won't kill you.

YELLOW SNAKE. Suiva!

SUIVA. He chose me. He will hear me.

YELLOW SNAKE. He didn't choose. He bought you.

[LERII *enters unnoticed on the left.*]

SUIVA. Yellow Snake!

YELLOW SNAKE. Your mother sold you to him for ten cows.

SUIVA [*drawing away*]. Yellow Snake!

YELLOW SNAKE. Ten cows for Shiny Bird!

SUIVA. For Shiny Bird?

YELLOW SNAKE. To keep old Waning Moon.

SUIVA. He's made you mad.

LERII [*unexpectedly*]. Shiny Bird is driving ten cows to his pasture.

SUIVA [*startled*]. Lerii!

YELLOW SNAKE. There!

LERII. But they're not Kotwi's cattle.

YELLOW SNAKE. Who's?

LERII. Mablo's!

YELLOW SNAKE. Mablo's!

LERII. Aie! But that won't help you! [*He laughs, and runs to the left.*]

YELLOW SNAKE. Mablo's!

SUIVA. Yellow Snake, go now while the God lets you.

YELLOW SNAKE. Mablo bought you. This is the trap he made. Now, will you come?

SUIVA. I'll pray the God to take his madness from you.

YELLOW SNAKE. Madness?

[*Suddenly, the goat drums sound on the left.*]

SUIVA. Yellow Snake!

YELLOW SNAKE [*trying to draw her away*]. Come quickly.

SUIVA [*freeing herself*]. No! [*She turns to him again and takes him in her arms.*] Yellow Snake! [*She kisses him and springs away.*] Now, go! They'll kill you!

YELLOW SNAKE. Come!

SUIVA. They'll kill me if they find you here. [*The drums grow louder.*] Do you want them to kill me?

YELLOW SNAKE. Suiva!

SUIVA. Go!

[*The drums grow louder.*]

YELLOW SNAKE. I'll come to-night.

SUIVA. You mustn't.

YELLOW SNAKE. Yes.

SUIVA. I'll be his priestess!

YELLOW SNAKE. No. Don't take the vows. Pretend the God has struck you. Say no word. Fall down upon the altar. Then, to-night, we'll go.

SUIVA. Yellow Snake.

YELLOW SNAKE. I'll watch you from the rock. Don't take the vows!

[*He goes to the flat-topped rock, climbs it, and lies on the top.* WANING MOON *comes from the cavern.*]

WANING MOON. Suiva, stand upon the altar. Face the God! [SUIVA *does so.* WANING MOON *mounts the steps and stands to the right, the brazier between them. She picks up the jug of oil and pours some on the fire, lighting the scene with a flaring brilliance. The procession enters from the left. First come* AMBURI *and* MABLO*; then two old men beating drums; then the worshippers, all old men and women dressed in coloured blankets and the skins of mountain animals. They arrange themselves in a large semi-circle around the altar, the Chief and* MABLO *standing apart at the extreme right. The drums cease, and, after a short pause,* WANING MOON *makes one step forward and raises her hand.*] Great Chief and Great Chief's son, and you old men and women, bow your heads! [*The worshippers do so simultaneously.*] Fear you the God?

THE WORSHIPPERS. We fear him.

WANING MOON. Has any man killed any beast to-day?

AN OLD MAN [*raising his head*]. My son killed a black bear beyond the canyon.

WANING MOON. The God will take one shoulder for his part.

THE OLD MAN. My son shall bring it at to-morrow's dawn.

WANING MOON. And let him fear the God. The God is great.

THE WORSHIPPERS. He giveth us full bellies.

WANING MOON. The God is good to them that love his priestess.

THE WORSHIPPERS. We love you well.

WANING MOON. The God will hear her when she prays for you, and he will fill your bellies.

THE WORSHIPPERS [*raising their heads*]. The God is great; he is the God of Gods.

WANING MOON [*addressing the image*]. Great God of Gods, I was your priestess when the world was young. And now the world is old, and I am old. I am the Waning Moon and I have spent my brightness in your service. Already you have crooked your finger at me and soon you will take me to your Yellow Tent. There, you have made a place for me beside you and I shall sit all seasons at your feet. And, though I leave my place here to another, and go to live with Shiny Bird, the tribe must know that I'm no common person, that I am still your daughter. They must know that if they work me ill your hand will strike them. That you will shut them from your Yellow Tent. [*She turns to the worshippers.*] Hear you his will?

THE WORSHIPPERS. We hear it.

WANING MOON. Then, bide by it, and he will prosper you.

AMBURI. Even as we fear him, we shall bide by it.

WANING MOON. He willed it that the Old Moon should have rest. He whispered in my ear that I should work no more, and then he broke the sky with a loud thunder, and rent the sky with a bright spear of fire. And the loud thunder said to me, "Choose Suiva for the Young Moon;" and the bright spear was

pointed at her house. And I made known to her the great God's bidding and she is come to take his holy vows. [*She turns to* SUIVA.] Stand forth, Young Moon. [SUIVA *turns, moves forward, and faces the worshippers.* WANING MOON *turns again to the worshippers.*] Here is a maiden with the Moon upon her. Before I lay the white flowers on her head, will any say that she's not fit to serve him? [*She pauses. There is no response.*] Will any say that she has lied or stolen? [*She pauses. There is no response.*] Will any say that she is not a virgin? [*She pauses. There is no response.*] Then, will you love her as you love the Old Moon?

THE WORSHIPPERS. Aie! We'll love her.

WANING MOON. And you will fear her as you feared the Old Moon?

THE WORSHIPPERS. Aie! We'll fear her as we feared the Old Moon.

WANING MOON. The God has heard you. He will not forget you. [*She turns to* SUIVA.] Young Moon, as the God spoke, the tribe has spoken. Do you wish them well?

SUIVA. I wish them well.

WANING MOON. In peace and war?

SUIVA. Their bellies shall be filled. The daggers of their enemies shall be broken.

WANING MOON. And when they die?

SUIVA. Those who have loved and feared me, shall be taken to his Yellow Tent.

THE WORSHIPPERS. We love you and we fear you.

WANING MOON [*handing her the oil*]. Will you guard his fire?

SUIVA [*pouring on oil*]. As now I guard it. [*She hands back the jug of oil.* WANING MOON *offers her the plate of meat.*]

WANING MOON. And will you feed him?

[SUIVA *takes a scrap of meat and lays it on the fire.*]

SUIVA. As now I feed him.

[WANING MOON *lays down the meat and takes up the sacrificial knife which she hands to* SUIVA.]

WANING MOON. And will you shear the foeman's hair to fill his nose with incense?

SUIVA [*taking the knife*]. With this knife will I shear it.

[*She hands back the knife.* WANING MOON *extends the cup of wine, in which* SUIVA *dips her fingers.*]

WANING MOON. And will you give him the sweet wine to drink?

SUIVA. As now I give it.

[*She turns to the image and wets its lips with her fingers.* WANING MOON *puts down the goblet and takes up the wreath of white flowers.* YELLOW SNAKE, *unable to control his agony raises himself on his knees and peers downward at the altar. He is easily discerned by the audience, but is not, as yet, discovered by the worshippers. But* SUIVA *sees him, as she turns and comes forward to the front of the altar.*]

WANING MOON [*holding the wreath*]. These are the sacred flowers; the flowers of the God. Before I lay them on your head, make prayer. [SUIVA *closes her eyes for a moment, then raises them to* YELLOW SNAKE, *who holds out his arms to her; then, looks at* WANING MOON.] Do you renounce all men to serve the God?

SUIVA [*raising her right hand*]. I renounce all men, all love, all hope of home and children. I shall serve him now, all days and nights, all summers and all

winters, till I'm old as the Old Moon. I swear it by his hand.

[*A sound escapes* YELLOW SNAKE. MABLO *hears it, discovers him, and points him out to* AMBURI. *He is about to give the alarm when* AMBURI *puts his hand over his mouth.* AMBURI *removes his hand and seizes his arm. The two men never take their eyes from* YELLOW SNAKE *until the ceremony is finished.* YELLOW SNAKE *is not seen by any of the worshippers.* WANING MOON *places the crown on* SUIVA'S *head; then turns to the worshippers.*]

WANING MOON. The crown is on her. The Young Moon is here.

[*The drums sound. The worshippers with bent heads, and arms extended, go out backwards to the left.*]

THE WORSHIPPERS. The Moon, the Moon is here! Young Moon, we fear you.

[SUIVA *and* WANING MOON *come down from the altar, and, facing the retiring worshippers, walk backwards to the cavern into which they disappear at the same time as the drumbeaters, the last of the worshippers, go out left.* MABLO *and* AMBURI *remain as they were with eyes fixed on* YELLOW SNAKE, *who, thinking himself unobserved, begins to climb upward. They watch him until he is out of sight. Then,* AMBURI *releases* MABLO'S *arm.*]

AMBURI. Go and kill him.

MABLO. I?

AMBURI [*disdainfully*]. Tell the young men to kill him and bring his body here.

[MABLO *hurries out to the left.* AMBURI *folds his arms in an attitude of waiting.*]

[CURTAIN]

ACT III

SCENE.—*The same as Act II. Fifteen minutes have elapsed. It has grown a little darker. Otherwise, the scene is unchanged. As the curtain rises,* SUIVA *enters from the cavern, goes stealthily to the base of the flat rock, and calls softly.*

SUIVA. Yellow Snake! . . . Yellow Snake! Go now, the way is clear.

[*She turns, goes to the altar, climbs the steps, and looks across the top of the rock. Realizing that* YELLOW SNAKE *has gone she utters a sigh of relief; then, extends her arms as though he were still there and lets them fall with a gesture of resignation.* WANING MOON *comes from the cavern and approaches her. She is carrying a pot containing sulphurous paste.*]

WANING MOON. The fire is low.
SUIVA. I'll tend it.

[*She picks up the jug of oil.*]

WANING MOON. Not oil! Not oil! That's only for the rites. Lay pine bark on it. [SUIVA *replenishes the fire with pine bark.*] So. Don't smother it. It's good dry bark and full of gum. The trouble is, it burns too quickly. When you want to sleep, you must use green wood. Only be careful that it doesn't die.

[WANING MOON *picks up the cup and drinks.*]

SUIVA. I know the law. If the fire dies the God will kill me. And the tribe will suffer for two seasons.

WANING MOON. There is nothing like old wine. What's that you said?

SUIVA. I said the God would kill me.

WANING MOON. If that were so, I'd be already dead.

SUIVA. You let it out!

WANING MOON [*drinking again*]. How can I wake to tend it when I'm drunk? No harm has come. And none will come unless the tribe find out. For that I keep a firestick in the cavern.

SUIVA. Was there no famine?

WANING MOON. Famine? No! But the tribe might have killed me. You had better be careful. Amburi fears the God as a blind man fears thunder. No matter what you tell him, he'll believe it. He's the best friend we have. He keeps the tribe in order. For fear of him they dare not slight the God. But he's a just man. It's all one to him, the priestess and the people. It's the God he fears. So, if you speak from God to make a law, you'd better mind it, for if you break it, and he catches you, he'll kill you quickly as he would a squirrel.

SUIVA. Then it's the Chief who punishes the priestess?

WANING MOON [*slightly tipsy*]. The God, the Chief, the priestess, how do I know? We're so mixed up together, who can tell? The wine is good. Will you not drink? [*She proffers the cup.*]

SUIVA. I thought the wine was sacred.

WANING MOON. No more than we are. Drink.

SUIVA. I don't like it.

WANING MOON. You'll learn to like it. And you'll tell the tribe to bring the God his goat-skin every month. And it must be old wine of such a colour; old wine that warms the heart. The God hates new wine as he does old meat!

SUIVA. Does the God hate it, or do you?

WANING MOON. What he likes, I like; but what I hate, he hates. We do not differ, the old God and I.

He speaks, I answer. I speak, he answers. It is the same word always.

SUIVA. When does he speak to you?

WANING MOON. Most often when I've had three cups. It's then I hear him roaring in the wind. At least, I think I hear him. Who can tell?

SUIVA. You told me that you heard him every day.

WANING MOON. Maybe I do.

SUIVA. But do you?

WANING MOON. I'd say so anyway, and so must you.

SUIVA. Why must I if it isn't true?

WANING MOON. The tribe expects the God to speak to you. If he does not, they'll think that you displease him. And if they think that you displease him, they'll find another priestess.

SUIVA [*eagerly*]. Will they let me go?

WANING MOON [*sardonically*]. Aie! They'll let you go into the pool to feed him! But if you listen you may hear his voice.

SUIVA. I've always feared him. He should speak to me.

WANING MOON. Maybe he will. But if he doesn't, I'll be here. I'll tell you what to say.

SUIVA. You're not the God.

WANING MOON. My ways have been his ways for fifty years. I know his will, and you'd do well to listen when I speak.

SUIVA. Then, tell me this: If there should come a man, a young man, here, and take a stick and strike the God with it, what would he do?

WANING MOON. The Chief would kill him for his blasphemy.

SUIVA. Yes, but the God? What would the God do? Would he lay madness on him?

WANING MOON [*judicially*]. The priestess might pour poison in his cup.

SUIVA. But would the God himself lay madness on him?

WANING MOON. Not without your help.

SUIVA. But, if I prayed him?

WANING MOON. Prayers are not enough.

SUIVA. Has he no power to act without my help?

WANING MOON. You and he are one. You have your strength together.

SUIVA. But he has strength alone. I have seen his red eyes gleam.

WANING MOON. I'll show you how they gleam. I came to show you that, but I forgot. [*She mounts the altar. Dabs her fingers in the pot of paste and bends down to* SUIVA.] You see this paste, now watch what I can do! [*She smears two thick circles about the eyes of the image.*] Lay it on thick, so they shine the brighter!

SUIVA. But they don't shine.

[WANING MOON *lays down the pot, picks up the cup of wine and dips her fingers in it.*]

WANING MOON. Now, look. [*She exhibits her fingers, which glow with a soft light.*]

SUIVA [*terrified*]. His fire is on you!

WANING MOON [*laughing creakily*]. Aie! His fire is on me. And there is another pot inside the cavern. If you want more I'll show you how to make it. [*She twiddles her fingers.*] Don't be afraid. It doesn't burn. I get it from the mountain.

SUIVA. What is it?

WANING MOON. I don't know. I saw it gleaming in the rain one night. And then I learnt to make it strong by baking it in an oven of hot stones. Some day I'll show you. [SUIVA, *overcome with her disillusion, sinks down on the altar steps.* WANING MOON *continues*] If any slight the God, then wet his eyes and they'll fall down before him on their bellies. They'll fear his anger, and they'll mend their ways. They'll bring him gifts, as many as you tell them. [*She pauses,*

glances down at SUIVA.] What's the matter? Are you sick?

SUIVA. I want to go away.

WANING MOON [*not unkindly*]. You can't go now.

SUIVA. I want my mother.

WANING MOON. She'll come to you to-morrow. She'll come every day. You'll feed her with the God's meat.

SUIVA. Was it for that she sold me?

WANING MOON. Sold you?

SUIVA. Yes.

WANING MOON. Who said your mother sold you? [SUIVA *does not reply.*] Your mother did not sell you. But if she had there'd be no harm. There's not a girl in all the tribe who does not envy you. You'll never come in hungry from the hunt and have no meat. Those days are gone.

SUIVA. My lover's gone.

WANING MOON. Aie! It's not sweet to live without a man. And none come here except the old men. Only the old men, and Mablo.

SUIVA. Mablo!

WANING MOON. Aie! And it was he that wanted you to mate. Don't be too sad. He comes here when he likes. And he's a fine man.

[*She pats her consolingly on the shoulder, and crosses to the cavern, which she enters carrying with her the pot of paste. There is rather a long interval during which* SUIVA *sits motionless, occupied with her thoughts.* MABLO, *carrying a bow and arrows, comes in quickly from the left. After glancing about the place he discovers her and approaches. She rises to meet him.*]

MABLO. Have you seen my father?

SUIVA. No.

MABLO. I left him here. I thought he'd wait.

SUIVA. He may come back.

MABLO. Aie! He'll come back. I have some news for him. Some news he'll like to hear. [SUIVA *tries to walk past him into the cavern.*] Where are you going?

SUIVA. What is that to you?

MABLO. I'll be your friend, Young Moon.

SUIVA. Then, let me pass.

MABLO. Wait till my father comes.

SUIVA. I want to go into the cavern.

MABLO. It isn't late.

SUIVA. I am tired.

MABLO. Do you sleep lightly? Would you hear me if I called you?

SUIVA. This morning I whipped you. If you come to-night I'll use a knife.

MABLO. You're not so wild as that. And if you were I'd tame you. [*He thumps his chest.*] I'm a man.

[AMBURI *enters from the right.* SUIVA *see him.*]

SUIVA. There is your father.

[*She goes quickly into the cavern.* MABLO *joins his father. They meet down left.*]

AMBURI. Well?

MABLO. I killed him, father!

AMBURI [*incredulously*]. You!

MABLO. The others would not for the songs he makes.

AMBURI. You say you killed him! You killed Yellow Snake! [*He lays his arm affectionately on* MABLO'S *arm.*] My son! I'm proud of you! How did you kill him?

MABLO. Alone I did it.

AMBURI. How?

[MABLO *contorts himself indicating the small of his back.*]

MABLO. I shot him here.

AMBURI. Behind!

MABLO. He never saw me. He never knew that I was there.

AMBURI. You shot him in the back?

MABLO. While he was climbing. He fell and is twice dead. Did I not well?

AMBURI. Aie! You did well! You did so well the squaws shall spit on you.

MABLO. Father!

AMBURI. You, my son!

MABLO. You said to kill him!

AMBURI. Yes, but kill him so! An arrow in the back! Is that the Chief's way? Can't you use the knife?

MABLO. But he'd have killed me with the knife!

AMBURI. What of it?

MABLO. What of it?

AMBURI. Yes.

MABLO. But . . . but, father, I'd be dead!

AMBURI. Aie! You'd be dead. But dead as a chief dies; not living like the groundhog coward you are. You shall have women's clothes!

MABLO [*in agony*]. No! No!

AMBURI. You shall have women's clothes and wear them for the passing of one moon. And I shall tell the squaws to spit on you; and the children, they shall spit on you.

MABLO. I will not!

AMBURI. What!

MABLO. Yes! Yes! I'll wear them!

AMBURI. Your shame has poisoned me. The man you killed broke the God's law, but he was not a coward. And for a son, I'd rather have him dead than you alive.

MABLO. They've brought his body to the gate. What shall I tell them?

AMBURI. Tell them to make it ready for the rites. [MABLO *slinks out left.* AMBURI *pauses for a moment in meditation, then turns to the cavern and calls*] Old Moon!

[WANING MOON *comes scurrying out.*]

WANING MOON. Great Chief!

AMBURI. Is the God hungry, Old Moon?

WANING MOON. The God is hungry. He said at sunrise that he wanted fresh meat.

AMBURI. Is the time good for sacrifice?

WANING MOON. The time is good. The sun was red to-night.

AMBURI. The sky was red with streaks of yellow gold. What does that mean?

WANING MOON [*glibly*]. Great good will follow on the sacrifice. He'll send the buffalo to the near water holes.

AMBURI. What would he do for the great sacrifice?

WANING MOON. The great sacrifice?

AMBURI. You heard me.

WANING MOON. Is it a man or woman?

AMBURI. It's a man.

WANING MOON. For a man-sacrifice, he'll send the caribou again across the ranges.

AMBURI. Good! Have the Young Moon make ready for the rites.

WANING MOON. To-night?

AMBURI. His body's at the gate.

WANING MOON. Is it a young man?

AMBURI. A young man from the Blue Sea country, caught on our hunting-ground. You tell her that.

WANING MOON [*turning*]. I'll tell her.

[*She goes part way to the cavern.*]

AMBURI. Come here! [*She returns.*] You'll tell her, but it's not the truth.

WANING MOON. Great Chief!

[AMBURI *scrutinizes her intently.*]

AMBURI. Was there a young man here to-day?

WANING MOON [*with genuine surprise*]. A young man here!

AMBURI. Within the gate?

WANING MOON. How could there be?

AMBURI. There was a young man here!

WANING MOON. I didn't know it!

AMBURI. Your face is like your words. I hold you guiltless.

WANING MOON. He must be killed.

AMBURI. He has been killed.

WANING MOON. Who is he?

AMBURI. Yellow Snake.

WANING MOON. The singer? . . . That is good!

AMBURI. They say he loves the Young Moon.

WANING MOON. It may be.

AMBURI. Does she love him?

WANING MOON. I don't know.

AMBURI. Can you find out?

WANING MOON. She might not tell the truth.

AMBURI. It may be that she knew that he was here. She may have called him to her. If she is guilty and I let her live, the God will take his favour from the tribe. Is not that his word?

WANING MOON. That was the word he spoke.

AMBURI. We cannot change it. But it may be that she is innocent. She may not love him; she may not know that he was here.

WANING MOON. How can you tell?

AMBURI. The old men shall bring in the sacrifice. And I shall judge her as she pulls back the white cloth from his face.

WANING MOON [*admiringly*]. Aie!

AMBURI. Now, make her ready while I lead them in. [AMBURI *goes left, pausing at the exit.*] If you should tell her to beware . . .

WANING MOON. May the God strike me!

AMBURI. With my hand!

WANING MOON. So be it! [*He goes out left.* WANING MOON, *who has bowed before him, straightens up, gasping. She has had a very real fright. There is a*

momentary pause during which she composes herself. Then she goes towards the cavern calling] Young Moon! Come out here!

[SUIVA, *dressed as before, comes from the cavern.*]

SUIVA. What is it?

WANING MOON. The great sacrifice.

SUIVA. A man?

WANING MOON. A hunter from the Blue Sea country. Our young men killed him where the hills divide.

SUIVA. When did they kill him?

WANING MOON. When the sun was high. Their arms are sore from carrying his body.

SUIVA. I hadn't heard there was a hunter killed.

WANING MOON. They have just come in. The way was long and steep.

SUIVA. Is he a young man?

WANING MOON. I don't know.

SUIVA. Where have they laid his body?

WANING MOON. At the gate. The old men make it ready for the rites.

SUIVA. So soon?

WANING MOON. The beaters hold the death drums in their hands. Come quickly and I'll show you what to do.

SUIVA. Must I?

WANING MOON. Who else?

SUIVA. You do it for to-night.

WANING MOON. I am no more his priestess. [*They go to the altar.* WANING MOON *hands her the knife.*] Here's the knife. [SUIVA *takes it.*] Now, stand upon the altar! [SUIVA *mounts the altar.*] Further back! [SUIVA *moves back a step.* WANING MOON *indicates the forward part of the altar.*] They lay it here, and when the drums have ceased you pour a flame of oil upon the fire. Now, do you know the rites?

SUIVA. Yes, we used to play them when I was a child. We took turns being priestess. But, then, I never thought . . . [*The drums sound. The weird, monotonous muffled beating grows louder and louder as the worshippers approach.*] They're coming!

WANING MOON. Speak up boldly!

SUIVA. Yes, I'll try.

WANING MOON. When you have cut the burning of his hair, and offered it, what then?

SUIVA. I draw the white cloth from his face and say, "This is my enemy. He shall feed the God." And then the old men throw him in the pool.

WANING MOON. You know the rites. I have no more to tell you.

[*She goes to the right.*]

SUIVA. Stay with me!

WANING MOON. I cannot.

SUIVA. Why?

WANING MOON. Now you must stand alone.

[*She takes her place at some distance to the right. There enter from the left in procession* AMBURI *and* MABLO, *the bearers of the death drums, eight old men carrying the body of* YELLOW SNAKE, *and a large following of old men and women. The bearers lay the shrouded body on the altar, and the procession arranges itself to left and right in the form of a V of which the altar is the apex. The drums cease.* SUIVA *pours oil on the fire, lighting the scene with a weird, flaring brilliance.*]

SUIVA. Fear you the God?

THE WORSHIPPERS [*with bent heads*]. We fear him.

SUIVA. The God will hear me when I pray for you and he will fill your bellies.

THE WORSHIPPERS [*raising their heads*]. The God is great; he is the God of Gods.

SUIVA. Where do the hunters go with swift brown feet?

AMBURI [*stepping forward*]. Over all lands to serve the God.

SUIVA. Are the God's hunters home from the far lands?

AMBURI. From the far lands the hunters all are home.

SUIVA. Do their swift arrows cling to the light deer?

AMBURI. They cling not to the deer or bear or cougar.

SUIVA. Did their spent arrows fall upon the mountain?

AMBURI. Their arrows did not fall upon the mountain.

SUIVA. Where did their arrows fall?

AMBURI. They fell upon the white thing at your feet.

[SUIVA *pretends not to have seen it before.*]

SUIVA. What is this white thing? . . . Is it the body of a fish or bird?

AMBURI. It did not live in water or in air.

SUIVA. Is this a body that stood straight and strong?

AMBURI. A brown snake crawls but this one did not crawl.

SUIVA. Is this a cunning body with bound hair?

AMBURI. We caught no wild sheep in the twisted thorn.

SUIVA. Is this a body with a voice to speak?

AMBURI. The hill dog barks but this one did not bark.

SUIVA. It is not fish or bird or beast. What is it?

AMBURI. Honour to God and favour to the tribe.

SUIVA. Speak, that the God may know! What is this white thing?

AMBURI. The white thing is a man.

SUIVA [*greatly surprised*]. A man!

AMBURI. He was our enemy that loved us not.

SUIVA. He is my enemy. The God has struck him.

AMBURI. He was our enemy that feared us not.

SUIVA. He is my enemy. The God shall eat him.

AMBURI. He was a fighter but he'll fight no more.

SUIVA. He was a hunter but he'll hunt no more.

AMBURI. He was a singer but he'll sing no more.

SUIVA. He was a lover but he'll love no more.

AMBURI. In all the moons his mate shall find him not.

SUIVA. Her feet are weary but she'll find him not.

AMBURI. Will the God breathe the burning of his hair?

SUIVA. The knife is sharp. The flame is hot and bright.

AMBURI. Then cut, and may the great God prosper us!

[SUIVA *takes the sacrificial knife, kneels by the body and without uncovering the face, seizes the hair with her left hand.*]

SUIVA [*addressing the body*]. My hand is in your hair. Why don't you strike me? [*She threatens it with the knife.*] Am I your mate that you fear not my hand? . . . Are you asleep? [*She shakes him.*] Wake up! . . . Or are you dead? [*She pauses. Then, tauntingly*] Strong man, you're dead! You're dead! You'll wake no more! My enemy is dead. He cannot harm me. My hand is in his hair. He cannot strike me. My enemy is dead. He'll wake no more. [*Again addressing the body*] You were a fighter but you'll fight no more. You were a hunter but you'll hunt no more. You were a singer but you'll sing no more. You were a dancer but you'll dance no more. You were a lover but you'll love no more. You'll toss no more your dark hair to the sky! [*She severs a lock of hair and springs to her feet brandishing it.*]

See now, my enemy, how weak you are! And I, the daughter of the God, am strong! And as I hold your cut hair in my hand, so does he hold your spirit. And as I crush your hair in my hand, so shall he crush your spirit. [*She holds the severed lock above the fire and addresses the image.*] Great God! Make wide your nostrils! Breathe it deep! [*She scatters it on the fire.*] And have more hunger for the sacrifice!

THE WORSHIPPERS. The sacrifice!

[SUIVA *prods the body with her foot.*]

SUIVA. Strong man, strong man, my foot is on your heart. The great God struck you and you've come to naught. And now, the God will look upon your face, and shut your spirit from his Yellow Tent.

[*She kneels by the body.*]

THE WORSHIPPERS [*at high tension*]. The face! The face!

SUIVA [*withdrawing the cloth*]. You are my enemy. You shall feed the God. [*She recognizes him. There is a long, tense, motionless pause. She lays her hand on his head and turns to the worshippers with childish bewilderment.*] This is no enemy. This is my beloved. [*They jeer at her. She looks at them uncomprehendingly, then at the image, then at* YELLOW SNAKE.] What have they done to you? [*More jeers.*] This is my mate.

KOTWI [*shrieking*]. He's not your mate!

SUIVA. Mother! . . . He is my mate. [*She turns again to the body and strokes the hair.*] Yellow Snake! Speak to me! I'm your mate!

AMBURI [*harshly*]. Since when has the God's priestess had a mate?

[SUIVA *ponders his words for a moment, glances at her white vestment, gets up and loosens it at the shoulders. It falls from her, leaving her clad in the fawn-skin.*]

SUIVA [*with childish relief*]. Is that it? [*She kneels by the body.*] Now, will you speak to me? I am no more his daughter. I'm your mate. I am your Suiva as I used to be. Now, if you ask me I will go with you. Will you not ask me? Speak! . . . Or are you angry with me? . . . [*Pleadingly*] Yellow Snake! Look at me. Be not angry. [*With arms outstretched*] See! I am your mate again. And all is well . . . Be no more angry. Speak! Tell me of Hidden Water! Take me there! Take me to Hidden Water! [*She turns to the worshippers.*] He doesn't hear me. [*They jeer more loudly. She bends over him again and feels the coldness of his face. She gets up and faces them with dawning realization.*] What have you done to him? [*More jeers, silenced by* AMBURI'S *voice.*]

AMBURI. Why did he come here?

SUIVA. He came because he loves me and I love him. What have you done to him?

AMBURI. Your lips have spoken. [*He turns to the bearers who are crouching by the altar.*] Make the sacrifice!

THE WORSHIPPERS. The sacrifice!

[*The bearers spring forward and seize the body.* SUIVA *tries vainly to withhold them.*]

SUIVA. He's mine! You shall not! [*They topple the body from the altar into the pool. A great cry goes up. The bearers crouch back to their former places.* SUIVA *bends over the pool and when the body strikes the water, some sixty feet below, she flings up her hands and turns shrieking on the worshippers.*] You! You! My people! You have killed my mate!

AMBURI. Old men, make ready!

[*The old men by the altar draw their knives.*]

SUIVA. Will you kill me too?

AMBURI. Kill her!

[*The old men rush forward.* SUIVA *stoops, picks up the silver moon and confronts them with it.*]

SUIVA. Kill me! [*They waver and fall back.*] Cowards!

AMBURI. Kill her!

[*The old men hesitate.*]

SUIVA. Come!

THE OLD MAN [*to* AMBURI]. We dare not.

SUIVA. Why? [*She indicates the image.*] The God won't hurt you. [*She picks up the wine cup.*] Look! [*She dashes the wine in the face of the image.*] His name is fear! [*She drops the cup.*] Now, kill me!

THE WORSHIPPERS [*recoiling*]. Profane!

SUIVA. This is not God. The God is dead. You killed him. He walked among you but you did not know him. He was God.

THE WORSHIPPERS. Profane! Profane!

SUIVA. He was the singer of the joy of life. His name was love. You killed him. He was God.

AMBURI. Kill her!

[*The old men again rush forward.* SUIVA *seizes the fire basket and draws it to the edge of the pool. The old men again draw back.*]

THE WORSHIPPERS [*whimpering*]. The fire!

SUIVA [*balancing it on the edge*]. Now will you kill me?

THE WORSHIPPERS. No!

SUIVA. Amburi, will you spare me?

AMBURI. Yes.

SUIVA. Cowards! You are more dead than he is.

[*She topples the fire basket into the pool.*]

THE WORSHIPPERS. The fire! The fire is gone!

[SUIVA *bends over the pool. Her voice is low, sweet, caressing.*]

SUIVA. My mate! My mate! My singer! My beloved! You had no fear. [*She stands proudly erect.*] And now . . . I have no fear. [*She steps from the altar into the pool.*]

THE WORSHIPPERS [*ignoring her completely*]. The fire! Famine and death!

[*The eyes of the image, smeared with sulphur and wet with wine, have begun to glow. An old squaw first notices them.*]

THE SQUAW [*shrieking*]. The eyes!

THE WORSHIPPERS [*in mortal terror*]. The eyes! The eyes!

AMBURI. Fall down before him! Fear him! He is angry!

[*As they prostrate themselves,* LERII *emerges from the throng. He stands looking down at them, and up at the image, and laughs his insane laugh. Then, all is quiet for a moment and the curtain falls.*]

THE FREEDOM OF JEAN GUICHET

A Play in Three Acts

BY

L. A. MacKAY

CHARACTERS

JEAN GUICHET.
LISETTE GUICHET [*wife of Jean*].
MADAME GUICHET [*mother of Jean*].
RAOUL GUICHET [*nephew of Jean*].
MADAME DULAC [*a neighbour*].
ANNETTE [*her daughter*].
RENÉE [*her niece*].
PIERRE BEAUREGARD [*husband of Susanne*].
SUZANNE BEAUREGARD [*cousin of Jean*].

The First Production of THE FREEDOM OF JEAN GUICHET took place in Hart House Theatre in April, 1925, with the following Cast:

Jean Guichet - - - - - - -	IVOR LEWIS
Lisette Guichet - - - - - -	GRACE WEBSTER
Madame Guichet - - - - - -	FRANCES ROSTANCE
Raoul Guichet - - - - - - -	MORLEY AYEARST
Madame Dulac - - - - - - -	DORA MACMILLAN
Annette - - - - - - - - - -	FLORENCE MCGEE
Renée - - - - - - - - - -	FLORENCE GLENN
Pierre Beauregard - - - - -	H. E. HITCHMAN
Suzanne Beauregard - - - -	MARGARET ROBERTSON

SCENE.—*The action of the play takes place in the living room of the Guichet home, in the Province of Quebec, about the year 1815.*

THE FREEDOM OF JEAN GUICHET

ACT I

As the curtain rises LISETTE GUICHET *and* MADAME GUICHET *are discovered gossipping.* RAOUL *is sitting farther back, reading.*

LISETTE. Well, you may say what you like, madame, but I don't like Suzanne. She is too much interested in my Jean, for one thing. She knows him better than his own wife, I suppose! Oh, I've seen how she's always taking his part against us. She thinks she's so clever. . . . . I tell you, if I were her husband. . . . . Oh, I'm not jealous, of course, I'm not afraid—only—you know yourself, Jean always has to have somebody to tell him what to do. He's always obeyed one or other of us all his life, and it's a good thing he has, too. And now, she's trying to spoil him, eh? Very well, we'll see. [*There is a knock at the door.* MME. DULAC *enters followed by* ANNETTE *and* RENÉE.] My dear Celeste! I am so glad to see you. Dear little Annette, too, and your charming niece! It's nice of you to come over and see us like this. I haven't been able to get away from the house for a week.

MME. GUICHET. I'm sure we're always glad to come. Aren't we, Annette?

ANNETTE. Yes, mamma.

MME. DULAC [*to* MME. GUICHET]. You're keeping well, madame?

MME. GUICHET [*dryly*]. Yes, thank you.

[RAOUL *greets the newcomers in a diffident and unwilling fashion and goes on reading.*]

MME. DULAC. What wonderful weather we're having! You have all your harvest in by now, I suppose. I've been so busy lately that I haven't seen you . . . .

MME. GUICHET. Since the day before yesterday.

MME. DULAC. Why—why, yes, I suppose you're right. I forgot. But then it was only for a few minutes, half an hour perhaps, an hour at the most. Is your husband pleased with the crops?

LISETTE. Yes, we have nothing to complain about. The good God has been very kind to us this year.

MME. DULAC. But with such land! Who wouldn't have a good crop? So rich and flat, all beside the river! How thankful Jean ought to be for a marriage that brought him such a farm, and a wife that knows so well how to handle him! He ought to thank God on his knees all the days of his life.

LISETTE. Some people don't think so.

MME. DULAC. They don't? Why, who—ever?

LISETTE. It seems his good cousin thinks he's very much to be pitied.

MME. DULAC. His cousin? Who do you mean?

LISETTE. Suzanne Beauregard, who is visiting here with her husband.

MME. DULAC. Oh, so that's who it is. People were saying some strangers had come. Everybody's talking about them. Aren't they, Annette?

ANNETTE. Yes, mamma.

MME. DULAC. Have they ever been here before?

LISETTE. No.

MME. DULAC. I don't seem to remember them. Do they live near?

LISETTE. No. They come from the city.

MME. DULAC. From the city? Oh! . . . Oh, I hope we shall have the honour . . .

LISETTE. Why, of course. They went out a few minutes ago for a walk. Suzanne said she wanted to see the sunset over the hills. She came from the back country up north. [*She shrugs her shoulders.*]

MME. DULAC. Ah, these backwoods people! We all know what they're like.

MME. GUICHET. Hardly human, are they? For example, your niece, and myself.

MME. DULAC. Oh, I never said . . . I didn't mean to say . . .

MME. GUICHET. Or wouldn't dare to say?

MME. DULAC. Oh, that's not fair, madame. I have always admired them very much. Haven't I, Annette?

MME. GUICHET. Be careful, now, or you'll get yourself into trouble with Lisette. She hates the whole lot of them, except Jean, perhaps. She loves him a little, I suppose, in her own way.

LISETTE. Madame, you know very well that I love my husband sincerely, and with my whole heart, even if I don't make a parade of it like certain others.

MME. GUICHET. Pierre and Suzanne again, eh?

LISETTE. Yes, Pierre and Suzanne again. [*To* MADAME DULAC] Just think of it. Here they've been married for years and years, and still treating one another as if it were yesterday. Isn't it ridiculous? Childish! Do you know, I am not sure that they're quite right in their heads. This evening, for example, out they went, arm in arm, to watch the sunset. What is there wonderful about that, I'd like to know. It's something new and unheard of, I suppose, that people have to run and see, for fear they never get another chance. The sun rises in the east and sets in the west every day the good Lord makes, and neither Jean nor I have ever in our lives stopped work to go and see it. What good is a sunset, anyway, except to foretell bad weather, and it's not very dependable about that.

MME. DULAC. Yes, it's silly. The sun was setting

just as I was coming here, and I'm sure I never even looked in that direction.

RENÉE. Oh, Aunt Celeste! But it was so lovely!

MME. GUICHET. Come and tell me about it, Renée. They don't come from the backwoods. They don't care about these frivolous and gay coloured things.

RENÉE. Would you like to see it, madame? I think there's still a little colour on the highest clouds.

MME. GUICHET. I'd love to, my dear.

RENÉE. The air is a little cool.

MME. GUICHET. Then, I shall want my shawl. [*She waits for* RAOUL *to get it for her.*] Raoul, it's getting cool. I'm going out. Do you think I'll need my shawl?

RAOUL. Likely. [*He continues to read.*]

RENÉE. Let me . . .

MME. GUICHET. Thank you, my dear, but . . . Raoul, you're right. I do need my shawl.

RAOUL. Hein? Why, yes, that's what I told you.

MME. GUICHET. I beg your pardon. I told you twice.

RAOUL. Yes. Oh, I'm sorry. I'll get it.

MME. GUICHET. One of these days, I'll stir that stupid up a bit with my stick.

RAOUL [*giving the shawl to* MME GUICHET]. Here it is, grandmother.

[MME. GUICHET *and* RENÉE *go out together.*]

MME. DULAC. The old lady's in a good humour, this evening, isn't she?

LISETTE [*shrugging her shoulders*]. Yes, as usual. If it weren't for her money . . .

MME. DULAC. Yes, I understand. I sympathize with you . . . Come over to the fire, child . . . She must be pretty hard to get along with. Ouf! But your Jean is so mild, so obedient.

RAOUL [*explosively*]. A man ought not to be.

MME. DULAC. What? He oughtn't to be?

RAOUL. Woman, I tell you, is the greatest mistake of a creator that's made millions and millions. But since

we have to try to keep ourselves as contented as possible, in this worst of all probable worlds, the man should always manage the woman conscientiously with a whip, or else a good heavy stick, with knobs on it.

ANNETTE [*coquettishly*]. Oh, m'sieu!

LISETTE [*contemptuously*]. He isn't crazy. It's only his education.

MME. DULAC. But really, m'sieu, do you mean that? You wouldn't really beat your wife.

RAOUL. If ever I find myself married, which God forbid, I shall beat my wife carefully, twice a day, for the good of her immortal soul, and mine.

LISETTE. Oh, it's all right to talk. You'll be just like all the rest, when the time comes. And besides, there's not very many women that would let you beat them, if you wanted to. Look at Annette. Do you think you could beat a girl like her if she wanted to stop you? She'd lead you by the nose like a little limping calf.

ANNETTE [*confused*]. Oh, madame.

RAOUL. Oh, if you're going to descend to personalities! [*He returns to his book.*]

LISETTE. Poor little fellow! His education has gone to his head. He's like my husband, he needs a good sensible wife to take all that nonsense out of him. Where will anybody find a better husband than mine, or a happier household? And it's all because I always keep him well in hand. I say to him, "Go there," and he goes. I say, "Come," and he comes.

RAOUL. Like a poodle-dog. [*He whistles and snaps his finger as if to call a dog.*]

MME. DULAC. Oh! m'sieu! Talk like that of your uncle!

RAOUL. Yes, of ten uncles if I have to, and of three hundred aunts.

MME. DULAC. But you haven't got ten uncles!

RAOUL. That's true, nor three hundred aunts neither. In fact, not even two hundred and ninety-nine.

LISETTE. And thank heaven, he adds, if they were all like me.

RAOUL. Oh, I have no special objection to you, Aunt Lise. Only, you are a woman, that's enough!

LISETTE. Good heavens, what a youngster you are, Raoul!

RAOUL. Is that a crime?

LISETTE. Perhaps. I'm not sure. Don't your books tell you?

MME. DULAC. Ah, how I wish I had an education. Just imagine! To be able to read in a book! What wonderful things he must find there!

LISETTE. Bah! Books! Some day, when he has a few more years on his head, and a few less ideas, he'll find more wonderful things in the eyes of a woman who cares for him. For, indeed, I cannot think of a greater wonder than that.

RAOUL. Thank you.

MME. DULAC [*looking towards* ANNETTE]. I am sure he will.

LISETTE [*noticing the look*]. So long as he doesn't go blind, altogether.

MME. DULAC. I don't understand.

LISETTE. So much the better.

MME. DULAC [*after a pause*]. Your Jean, doesn't he ever say anything?

LISETTE. No, of course not. What would you expect him to say?

MME. DULAC. I don't know.

LISETTE. Would you want him to say, "My excellent angel, with silvern eyes and lips of gold!"?

MME. DULAC. But that doesn't make sense.

LISETTE. I know it doesn't, but that is what Pierre said to Suzanne.

MME. DULAC. Pierre?

LISETTE. M'sieu Beaureguard.

MME. DULAC. Oh, perhaps people talk like that in the city.

RAOUL. No, in the city they still talk French.

MME. DULAC. They're just a little—? [*She taps her forehead.*]

LISETTE. Well, anyway, they've got more money than both of us put together.

MME. DULAC. Oh, are they rich?

LISETTE. I should say they are. And they both know how to read, too. So, I suppose we ought to pardon them a good deal. Perhaps, it's not so much their fault as their misfortune.

MME. DULAC. Misfortune? To be rich?

LISETTE. No, no, to be foolish. For all fools are not poor. Though all the poor are fools, I think.

MME. DULAC. Well, I don't like the idea of poverty.

LISETTE. No, nor I, foolishness. Oh, it makes me mad just to think of it. And she's the one to blame. It's always the woman has more influence on the man than the man on the woman.

RAOUL. That's true enough. You can get a man to change his mind if you're in the right, but all the angels in heaven can't make a woman change her mind if she's in the wrong,—which is always the case.

LISETTE. Raving again! [*To* MME. DULAC] You can't imagine how I hate that woman. There's something about her . . .

[*The door opens.* MME. GUICHET *and* RENÉE *come in. There is an uncomfortable silence.*]

MME. GUICHET. Well, well, how very quiet it is in the pigeon coop. [*Volubly*] But we'll just break up this solemn silence by chattering like two one-eyed magpies, eh? Or more likely, one two-eyed magpie, myself, and one blind, wooden magpie—that's you, my dear, without meaning any offense to either one of us; since these people would rather talk about us than to us.

LISETTE. You are mistaken, madame. It wasn't of you that we were talking.

MME. GUICHET. Thank you, Lisette. Alas, Renée, we're not so important as we thought we were. Let that teach you a little humility.

MME. DULAC. And I'm sure she needs it.

RENÉE [*to* MME. GUICHET]. Allow me, madame, to leave humility to those who enjoy it. The shield of pride is just as strong and a great deal brighter.

MME. DULAC. Well, I declare! Whoever heard the like!

RAOUL. If a man had said that, I should have called it a very worthy, and a very noble sentiment.

RENÉE. Do my lips make it any the less noble, m'sieu?

ANNETTE [*shocked*]. Your—oh, cousin!

RAOUL. It isn't the sort of talk that becomes a woman. A woman ought to be quiet, submissive, and gentle. She should love her husband, and him only, and obey him in everything.

MME. GUICHET. Should she not love her children?

RAOUL. Why, certainly.

MME. GUICHET. And them only, too, I suppose.

RAOUL. Yes—no—that is to say, she—well that doesn't matter, anyway. The main thing is that she obey her husband always according to the precepts of the ancients, who compared her to a vine, supported and sheltered by the tall and shady elm from the too-ardent rays of the sun.

MME. GUICHET. If the tree shades it too much, the grapes won't ripen.

LISETTE. How tender he is! That's the way you'd manage your wife with a club, is it? Using it to keep the sun off her?

RAOUL. What are you talking about?

LISETTE. A few minutes ago, you were going to knock your wife down with a club, twice a day, weren't you?

MME. DULAC. That's what he said. I wonder what hours he'd choose.

MME. GUICHET. Meal-time, probably.

RAOUL. Oh, if you're going to make a joke of everything! [*He returns to his book.*]

MME. GUICHET. Why no, not at all. We're quite serious. We want to learn. If our husbands haven't brought us up properly it's shocking.

LISETTE. Come on, you've had an education. Answer.

RAOUL. Answer what?

LISETTE. Just when would you beat your wife?

RAOUL. Oh, I'd find the time.

LISETTE. If you're never any busier than you are now, I can well believe it.

MME. GUICHET. But, if the good Lord made the man a vine, and the woman a tree, what then?

RAOUL. The good Lord never did such a thing.

MME. GUICHET. Oh, is that so. What would you do, Annette, if Raoul tried to beat you?

ANNETTE [*dropping her eyes*]. Oh, madame!

MME. GUICHET. Speak up, I won't let him touch you.

ANNETTE. Oh, madame, I—I don't know.

MME. GUICHET. Then, try to learn. Perhaps one of these fine mornings you will find the knowledge useful. What would you do, Renée?

RENÉE. I should probably throw him out of the window.

MME. DULAC. Renée!

RENÉE. Why not, if I could do it?

MME. DULAC. Well, I shouldn't want to see a daughter of mine act like that.

MME. GUICHET. Don't worry, madame, there isn't the slightest danger.

MME. DULAC. I should hope not, indeed. But I don't understand all this about elm trees and vines.

ANNETTE. Neither do I.

MADAME GUICHET. He meant there were two kinds of marriages: sometimes, it's the husband that rules, sometimes, the wife. What do you think about it, children? Which is the better, in your opinion?

MME. DULAC. Yes, Annette, tell us.

ANNETTE. Oh, really, I—really, I don't know.

RENÉE. I have dreamt sometimes of a marriage in which there would be no vine, no elm tree. Back there in our hills, not far from our little shack, I have seen two tall pine trees that stand together at the edge of a shining, little waterfall. One of them is not higher than the other and no more straight. They rush up into the air together, as proud and as joyful as the little stream itself that goes splashing down over the smooth narrow rocks, and the thick mosses. Their branches are so closely laced that from a little distance they look like a single tree, and their roots are so 'twined together that you couldn't hurt or help one without the other. That's what I think a happy marriage ought to be.

MME. GUICHET [*after a short silence*]. That's beautiful, indeed, and beautifully told. There are few women capable of it, and fewer men. When a marriage like that does happen, as with Pierre and Suzanne . . .

[PIERRE *and* SUZANNE *enter.*]

PIERRE. Look out for the steps, best beloved. [*To* LIZETTE] Tell me, my——er——approximate sister-in-law, why were they made like that?

LIZETTE. So the snow won't block the door in winter, of course; and the wind won't blow across the floor.

PIERRE. Why, of course, how stupid of me! But, who are these? Strangers?

LISETTE. Ah, yes. Madame Dulac, her daughter Annette, her niece, Renée, M'sieu and Madame Beauregard, who are visiting us.

PIERRE. What charming children! [*To* SUZANNE] Good-bye, dearest, I am off and away to fresher charms, like the heartless wretch I am. [*He crosses and sits between* RENÉE *and* ANNETTE.]

SUZANNE. Off with you, then, my love, to those poor little things, that don't know any better. They're

young and not very critical. I'll look out for myself, won't I? [*She sits beside* RAOUL. RAOUL *is slightly embarrassed.*]

LISETTE. I suppose I'm only an ignorant, country woman, but I must say, that seems to me a very queer way for a husband and wife to be talking.

PIERRE. Why, no, not at all. It only shows what admiration we have for one another. I am so fond of my wife, you see, that I have to love the whole sex which she adorns. All the beauty I see in others reminds me of her. I say, "This one has Suzanne's cheek, that one her voice, this her chin, or her ears, or her eyebrows. Therefore, she is admirable—so far, at least."

SUZANNE. And, since neither one of us can find anybody else so delightful and charming as the other one of us, we remain very happy indeed, and set ourselves to admire as much as we can, the imperfect beauty of the other creatures of the good God.

MME. DULAC. Such notions! I declare my head's spinning.

PIERRE. Oh, madame, don't let it do that! What if it stopped in the wrong place? Just imagine passing all the rest of one's life looking backwards! It would be such a job to get one's hand to one's mouth at the table, and as for lacing one's shoes, that would be altogether impossible!

MME. DULAC. Oh—oh—yes—that's quite true, m'sieu, but it isn't what I meant. I meant—I meant—well, anyway, it wasn't that. I don't know how to explain myself exactly, like you could, m'sieu. You speak—you speak like a book, m'sieu. Yes, that's it exactly, like a book. Doesn't he, Annette?

ANNETTE. Yes, mamma.

PIERRE. Bravo! You've solved my greatest difficulty. Only have patience, and sooner or later, everything comes to you.

MME. GUICHET. Usually later.

PIERRE. So much the more welcome, then.

LISETTE. What is your greatest difficulty?

PIERRE. I have been wondering for the last hour, which was Annette, and which was Renée. Now this one, does she look like an "A" or an "R"? I was afraid I should have to stick to vague, general remarks. General remarks! Think of it! Good heavens! To a pair of beautiful young girls. Now, thanks to that happy question of yours, madame, I know exactly where I am. [*Turning towards* RENÉE] Your name is Annette, and yours—no,—wait a minute. Am I right? Don't tell me. I'll find out for myself. [*He racks his brains for a moment, then turns to the two girls.*] Beautiful weather we had to-day, wasn't it?

ANNETTE *and* RENÉE. Yes, m'sieu.

PIERRE. Ough! the devil!

SUZANNE. Pierre!

PIERRE Yes, my angel. [*To the girls*] But it looks as if we were going to have a big storm before long, doesn't it?

ANNETTE. Yes, m'sieu.

RENÉE. Why, no, not at all, m'sieu. At least, not that I could see.

PIERRE. Ah, you think not, Renée? [*He rolls the "R" triumphantly.*] You're probably quite right.

MME. GUICHET. Certainly she's right. And so are you. [*To* SUZANNE] Ah, my dear, that's a clever man you have.

SUZANNE. A little naughty, though, sometimes.

MME. GUICHET. Tut, tut. So much the better. It's often needed.

MME. DULAC. Yes, he is certainly clever. He talks exactly like a book I'm sure, although I never read one.

PIERRE. But, madame, how can that be? I have lived with books all my life, and I never heard one of them say a word. How could they, poor things, with no tongue, no mouth, no throat.

MME. GUICHET. And no lungs. Don't forget them.

PIERRE. Thank you. [*To* MME. DULAC] But perhaps you meant like a brook. [*He makes a gesture in imitation of rippling water.*]

RENÉE [*mischievously*]. Or a rook. [*She imitates wings, flapping.*]

PIERRE. Bravo!

[*They all laugh. The outer door opens, and* JEAN *enters. There is a sudden silence.*]

PIERRE. Come right in, my dear fellow, and make yourself at home.

MME. DULAC. But he is at home.

PIERRE. That's true, isn't it? Well, it'll be all the easier.

JEAN [*standing timidly on the doorstep*]. I——I hope I'm not troubling you . . .

LISETTE. No, it's all right. Come in. Sit down there. [*He sits.*] How are the new cows doing?

JEAN. All right, I think.

LISETTE. Are they restless at all?

JEAN. The black one didn't want to go into the stable at first. She nearly caught me once with her hoof.

LISETT. Have you milked yet?

JEAN. Not yet. I hope it's no bother. It was so late when I got back.

LISETTE. You should have started home from the bush sooner. Remember next time. It upsets my work.

JEAN. Oh, I hope it's no bother.

LISETTE [*to* MME. DULAC]. Oh, I've been wanting to ask you. How are your apples this year?

MME. DULAC. Why, our trees are just loaded.

LISETTE. You're lucky. I don't know what's happened to ours. We'll hardly have a pailful.

MME. DULAC. Come and get some of ours, then. I'm sure my husband won't mind.

SUZANNE. What were you busy at to-day, Jean?

JEAN. Getting some wood ready for the winter.

SUZANNE. It must be pleasant working in the woods this weather.

JEAN. Yes. A little hot to-day.

[MME. GUICHET *begins to doze.*]

SUZANNE. I should think it would be, swinging a heavy axe for hours and hours on end. Don't you ever rest?

JEAN. Oh, some days.

SUZANNE. That isn't enough. People shouldn't just live to work.

LISETTE. Oh? What should they for, then?

MME. DULAC. Yes, what should they live for?

PIERRE. To enjoy themselves, course, for the glory of God and the health of their own soul and body.

LISETTE. That's even sillier than your usual talk.

PIERRE. Silly? Not a bit of it. What else would the good Lord want? "Be happy, my children." That's what he says. [*He embraces both girls at once.*]

MME. DULAC [*very coldly*]. Annette! Come here at once. I want to talk to you.

ANNETTE. Yes, mamma. [*She goes.*]

PIERRE. Oh, don't worry, madame, they're both calling me great-uncle, already. [*To* SUZANNE] You have to confess, my dear, that I've made a great deal more progress with them than you have with Raoul. He hasn't even called you grandmother.

SUZANNE. That's because the poor little fellow is so madly in love with me that he can't get a word out; even though I haven't said a word to him yet.

RAOUL [*shocked*]. Madame!

PIERRE. Ah, no, my love. I'm afraid you flatter yourself. He still hates the entire race of womankind with an absolutely inextinguishable detestation.

RAOUL [*without irony*]. I thank you, m'sieu, sincerely. Your statement of the case has my unlimited approbation.

PIERRE. You see, O light of my life unfailing! See what success you've had! What a pity it is you couldn't do better than that! He's such a handsome, such a gentle, such a lovable young man. Isn't he, Annette?

ANNETTE. Yes, m'sieu—oh, I beg your pardon, m'sieu. I didn't think what I was saying.

PIERRE. After all, it is only the truth. Ha, Renée, isn't he handsome?

RENÉE [*jesting*]. Yes, he is.

PIERRE. And gentle?

RENÉE. He looks like it.

PIERRE. And lovable?

RENÉE. Why, of course, very lovable.

PIERRE. Quite correct. [*With a great show of secrecy, but in the same voice*] Besides, he's—oh, so rich! [*To* SUZANNE] Watch me, now, thou on whose cheeks the gentle flame the sweetest sunset puts to shame, whose eyes outglow the seven skipping stars, watch me now, and see how much better my tactics are than yours. Annette, come here at once, I want to talk to you.

ANNETTE. Yes, m'sieu. [*She goes.*]

[PIERRE *talks with* ANNETTE *and* RENÉE, *pointing towards* RAOUL, *who is buried in his book.* ANNETTE *seems to demur at first, but finally agrees.*]

JEAN. I hope it's no bother, but . . .

LISETTE. Well, but what?

JEAN. There's still the cows to milk.

LISETTE. Well, for goodness' sake, go and milk them, then. Who's stopping you?

JEAN. But . . .

LISETTE. Hurry up. It's dark already. Can't wait all night. The cows will be getting restless.

JEAN. But—but . . .

LISETTE. But, but! What do you keep standing

there for, blatting like an old sick sheep? Buh, buh, buh! What's the matter with you?

JEAN. I—I—I haven't—

SUZANNE. Why, he hasn't had any supper, and here we were chattering away while he was starving to death.

LISETTE. Mon Dieu! You're as helpless as a child. Couldn't you find something for yourself? Come on, I'll get you a bite. Hurry up and get it into you and go and finish your work. [*She goes to the kitchen, followed by* JEAN.]

SUZANNE. Could I help you? [*She goes with* MME. DULAC *to the kitchen.*]

PIERRE [*concluding his conversation with the girls*]. You will? Good! That's splendid! I'll leave the field of battle clear. Madame is asleep. Forward march! [*He goes to the kitchen.*]

ANNETTE [*motioning to* RENÉE]. You, first.

RENÉE. No, you.

ANNETTE. Oh, I couldn't.

RENÉE. All right, then. . . . What are you reading, m'sieu?

RAOUL. "A Discourse on the Essential Nature of Things Terrestrial and Celestial, or an Account of the Divine Science of Astrology, and Its Soverain Influence on The Life of Man."

ANNETTE. Oh, that's not interesting. Tell us about the city.

RAOUL. But I don't want to talk. I want to read.

ANNETTE [*advancing*]. There must be so many pretty dresses there, and so many pretty women wearing them.

RAOUL. Possibly. I don't know anything about it.

ANNETTE. You don't know! Then, what was the good of living in the city?

RAOUL. I was studying.

RENÉE [*advancing*]. And what did you learn?

RAOUL. Among other things, I learned to mind my own business.

RENÉE [*innocently*]. Was that difficult?

ANNETTE. I am sure nothing would be hard for him.

RENÉE [*admiringly*]. It must be wonderful to be so clever!

RAOUL [*modestly*]. Oh,—really—

RENÉE. You see, Annette, how modest he is, with all his brains and his education. But it's no use trying to fool us.

ANNETTE. We've been hearing things. And he's such a worker too. How can you ever study so hard, m'sieu, without hurting your health?

RAOUL. I suppose it's just a gift of nature.

RENÉE. I suppose it is. The good God hasn't refused you anything.

ANNETTE. Nothing at all.

RAOUL. Oh, now you are making fun of me.

ANNETTE. Making fun of you? How could a couple of poor ignorant girls like us make fun of a great scholar?

RAOUL. You're much too flattering.

RENÉE. It's only the truth. You wouldn't want us to lie, surely, just because the truth does you credit.

RAOUL. Oh, but I can't believe it is the truth. Nobody ever . . . .

RENÉE. It's easily seen you only associated with men in the city.

RAOUL. Why, yes, that's true, but how—?

RENÉE. I knew it. They're all too jealous to tell you the truth about yourself.

ANNETTE. Yes, that's it. But we're not afraid to tell it, you see, because we can't ever hope to rival you.

RENÉE. Those men made you hate women, didn't they?

RAOUL. Why — — — no — — naturally I listened to what my friends said.

RENÉE. Your friends! That's what they called them-

selves, I don't doubt. They were afraid you'd meet some woman who would tell you the truth, and put them to shame.

RAOUL. Indeed it's true that I don't find women nearly as disagreeable as they painted them, nor as unreasonable. If there are more like you, mademoiselles, I shall begin to think they were in the wrong.

ANNETTE. Oh, we're not like you, m'sieu. There's nothing remarkable about us.

RAOUL. To tell the truth, I had noticed already, that you're both quite good looking—as women go, that is, but really I had no idea you could talk so sensibly, and with such sound logical power as I have heard you using to-night.

RENÉE. Perhaps you'll let yourself be astonished oftener after this.

RAOUL. I should be only too happy, if you desire it, to be of service, as you suggest, and, conscious though I am of my own limitations, I assure you I shall certainly do my best.

[SUZANNE *comes in followed by* PIERRE. *Through the open door,* LISETTE *is heard scolding* JEAN.]

LISETTE [*off*]. Hurry up, hurry up, can't you? You waste more time doing nothing. You haven't all night ahead of you!

SUZANNE [*closing the door*]. Listen to that! I can't stand it a minute longer.

PIERRE. Raoul, the moon is very beautiful on a night like this. Aren't you going to demonstrate that strange, important fact to the young ladies? [*To* ANNETTE *and* RENÉE] "Delighted," he says, offering you an arm apiece.

[*Acting on the suggestion, the girls seize* RAOUL *thus, and lead him out, somewhat dazed.* SUZANNE *carefully inspects* MME. GUICHET. *As the kitchen door is opened* LISETTE *is heard again.*]

LISETTE [*off*]. You'll have to milk by moonlight, now. Look out you don't spill any of it with your clumsiness. Hurry up. I never saw such a man. No, no! This pail, stupid. You're as helpless as a two-year-old . . . . Come back here, booby. What are you leaving this behind you for? You'll drive me crazy yet. Pick it up. Don't stand there looking at it. Pick it up, and get started. Will you never learn to look after yourself? That's right, blockhead, tumble over the bench. Oh, get out before I push you out.

[JEAN *enters. The door slams behind him.*]

SUZANNE. She's not very gentle with you, is she, Jean?

JEAN. Oh, if she were only a man! I tell you I won't stand it. One day she'll go too far, and then, I'll . . . . I'll . . . . Oh, I'm sorry. I hope I wasn't troubling you. [*He crosses and leaves by the other door.*]

SUZANNE. Isn't it horrible? She treats him just like she would one of the farm animals. He doesn't dare call his soul his own.

PIERRE. Yes. It's rather a pitiful sight. But what business is it of ours?

SUZANNE. What business of ours? Pierre, are you human?

PIERRE. Well, let's suppose so, for the moment, for the sake of argument. What then?

SUZANNE. We've got to try and make a man of him.

PIERRE. Oh, must we? Why?

SUZANNE. Why? Pierre, if you don't look out, I'll box your ears.

PIERRE [*offering his head*]. Box away, then, if you have to. And then tell me why.

SUZANNE. Why? For the sake of human dignity, if nothing else! You will take pity, won't you, on this poor, soft-hearted, helpless, foolish fellow? Won't you? For my sake?

PIERRE. For your sake? What has that got to do with it?

SUZANNE. A long, long time ago, when I was still very young—long before I met you, Pierre—I used to be—I used to be fond of Jean. I used to love him—oh, quite a bit. You will help him, won't you, Pierre? For my sake?

PIERRE. All right. I give in. Anything you like.

SUZANNE. It's going to be the two of us against his wife, his mother and himself.

PIERRE. No one else?

SUZANNE. I think that's all. Isn't it enough?

PIERRE. Oh, I suppose it will have to do. His mother too, you say? I rather like the old lady.

SUZANNE. So do I, that doesn't make any difference. She was the one that taught him to obey without thinking, in the first place. Tyranny is a habit with her. Even Lisette is afraid of her, if she isn't afraid of anybody else.

PIERRE. Yes, that's true enough. Well, what are we going to do about it?

SUZANNE. First of all, of course, nobody must guess what we're up to.

PIERRE. What if the old lady's been awake all along?

SUZANNE. It's all right. She's sound asleep. I've kept my eye on her. Do you think Raoul could help us?

PIERRE. I think he's more likely to need someone to help him, poor fellow. I've given him enough to worry about for a little while.

SUZANNE. What did you do it for? It's cruel.

PIERRE. Oh, he needs to be waked up, too. Isn't Renée a charming youngster?

SUZANNE. Yes, but that has nothing to do with our business. Here's my idea. We'll have to talk to Jean, both of us, often and seriously, and encourage him to stand up for himself.

PIERRE. I think it would be a great deal better to

leave him alone and not meddle. Do you remember the stories about the two men that he almost killed with his bare hands in the lumber camp once, when he lost his temper? There is no telling how far he'd go if he got started.

SUZANNE. There's no fear of him going too far. I'm only afraid he won't go far enough. That's why we have to keep encouraging him and urging him on. We shall have to interfere in all sorts of things, and keep upsetting Lisette's power little by little so that before long he'll get all his self-respect back, and be the man and the master that he ought to be. We'll have to do it quietly lest our part be suspected.

PIERRE. Why, that's war. War to the knife! It's black treachery. It isn't honest. Lisette will hate us like poison; and she'll have a right to.

SUZANNE. She'll never know. She hates us anyway.

PIERRE. Why, we've just come! That's nonsense. I can't believe that.

SUZANNE. No, of course you can't see it—you're only a man; but I know it.

PIERRE. I think you're mistaken, and, I tell you frankly, I don't like the idea.

SUZANNE. But you promised.

PIERRE. Yes, I promised. Herod was fool enough to hold to his fool's honour instead of his common sense, and got nothing but dishonour out of it. So will I.

SUZANNE. Remember, not a word, not a look that would betray us.

PIERRE. I'll remember. [*There are sounds of much commotion off-stage.*] Good heavens, what a racket!

[*The door opens suddenly and* RAOUL *rushes in followed by* ANNETTE *and* RENÉE *laughing.*]

RAOUL [*shouting*]. Get thee behind me, Satan. [*To* PIERRE] This is your fault, you—you—

MME. GUICHET [*waking*]. Hein? What's this? Have I been asleep?

PIERRE. My fault? What's my fault?

RAOUL. Oh, it's horrible. It's unspeakable!

PIERRE. Then, it must be interesting. Let me implore you. Speak, and solace the o'erburdened soul. Tell us, please, I beseech you.

RAOUL. Oh, go to the devil!

PIERRE [*bowing low*]. After you, m'sieu. But before we start, do tell us, or I warn you I'll burst with curiosity. Then you'd have to carry me. However, they say the road's fairly short.

SUZANNE. Tell me, Raoul, what's the matter?

RAOUL. Ah, women, women! Accursed be all women.

SUZANNE. Thank you very much. But why?

RAOUL. Why? Why? You see those—those——and there's not a blush on their faces.

SUZANNE. Why should there be?

PIERRE. Would that make them any lovelier? No. Impossible.

RAOUL. You see them, the brazen, shameless hussies. Do you know what they did?

PIERRE. We have just been trying to find out.

RAOUL. I took them—they pulled me—along the hedge, as far as the corner of the orchard. There I stopped, and with all the eloquence and all the learning at my command, I discoursed on the marvels of the heavens, the stars, the planets, and the constellations, their risings and their settings, their conjunctions and oppositions; and our stately lady, the moon, in the mild effulgence of her chaste, divine serenity. And then—then . . . .

PIERRE. Well, what?

RAOUL. While I was gazing up at her, spellbound and mute in mystic ecstacy—ah, how can I tell it?

MME. GUICHET. In the ordinary manner of mankind. With your voice.

RAOUL [*pointing to* RENÉE]. She—kissed me on the

lips, and, while I stood there stupefied, she, too. [*He points to* ANNETTE.]

PIERRE. Bravo! Well done!

MME. GUICHET. Eh? You remember the order, anyway.

ANNETTE. But we thought . . . .

RENÉE. And he looked so sweet, standing there, looking at the moon, like this. [*They laugh again.*] How could we help it?

RAOUL. Oh, it's horrible, horrible! [*He rushes from the room.*]

MME. GUICHET. Poor little fellow. [*To* PIERRE] But why does he blame you?

PIERRE. Oh, he's quite right in that. I'm completing his education.

ANNETTE [*to* RENÉE]. Let's go and tell the others.

[*They go out.*]

MME. GUICHET. It's a wise man that knows how much to meddle in other people's business.

PIERRE. Well, that's what I'm best at.

MME. GUICHET. Then be twice as careful not to go too far with it.

SUZANNE. It's too bad you were sleeping half an hour ago, madame. That's exactly what I was telling him. I'd have been very glad of your help.

PIERRE [*in mocking reproach*]. Suzanne!

MME. GUICHET. Oh, I know what I'm talking about. The people that are too sure of themselves always get a shaking up before long.

PIERRE [*laughing*]. I believe it. I believe it.

MME. GUICHET. Laughing, are you? Well, laugh if you like. We'll see.

PIERRE. Oh, yes, we'll see. I believe it, all right.

[SUZANNE *gives him a look of warning as the curtain falls.*]

ACT II

SCENE.—*The same. An evening ten days later.* PIERRE, SUZANNE *and* RAOUL *are discovered.*

PIERRE. Well, are you satisfied? We've been hard at work for over a week now and where's the difference?

SUZANNE. There isn't much yet, I know, but we mustn't lose heart. Forty years are a great deal stronger than a couple of short weeks.

PIERRE. But a day is enough to destroy the work of centuries.

SUZANNE. This isn't a question of destruction, but of building among the ruins, and that's always a hard job.

PIERRE. You can't build stone walls with mud. I don't like this way of doing things.

SUZANNE. Well, what other way is there?

PIERRE. And what's more, I'm afraid the stone itself is too weak and weatherbeaten to stand the strain.

SUZANNE. You may say what you like, you are not going to turn me aside now. Why didn't you tell me all that before?

PIERRE. I did. I told you dozens of times. I repeated it. You didn't pay any attention.

SUZANNE. No, I don't now, either. We're going to succeed. I know it. I feel it.

PIERRE. I wish I could believe you. But the enemy is strong; we're badly outnumbered. What about enlarging our army? [*He points to* RAOUL.]

SUZANNE. That's what I wanted to do long ago, but you wouldn't have it.

PIERRE. Likely I was wrong. Let's try it now.

SUZANNE. All right. It may be some help. It can't do any harm, anyway. Yes, speak to him.

PIERRE [*sneaking playfully behind* RAOUL, *then calling suddenly*]. Raoul!

RAOUL. M'sieu?

PIERRE. We need your advice. We need your help. Save, or we perish.

RAOUL. M'sieu has only to ask. I am deeply in his debt. I owe him all the worry and all the perplexity that beset me.

SUZANNE. Then let me beg you to forgive him. You know he meant no harm. Help us for the sake of one still more wretched than yourself.

RAOUL. More wretched than I? Who could be?

SUZANNE. Plenty of men are that. We want to help one of them, but we can't decide on any course of action. Won't you help us?

RAOUL. Action! Action! Why is all the world so raving mad about action? Isn't thought enough? They want action, action, always action. They shout in my ears from morning to night. "M'sieu, you must decide on some course of action. You must do something. What are you going to do, m'sieu? What are your intentions?" Oh, I shall go mad!

SUZANNE. Why, whatever is the matter, Raoul? You sound dreadfully worried.

RAOUL. Worried? Who wouldn't be with that old—

SUZANNE. Who do you mean?

RAOUL. Oh, Annette's mother. She keeps chasing me around from dawn to dark, shouting all the time at the top of her voice, "M'sieu, what are your intentions?"

SUZANNE. Well, what are they?

RAOUL. Do you think I know? Do you think I want to know? I love them both, not in the same way, of course, but how can I tell which more than the other? And it's you, that started all this; and now you want me to aid you. I could hate you, m'sieu, if my life were not so full of love that it has no room for hate.

PIERRE. I am very glad of that. That means, I suppose, that you are going to forgive me and help us? In my opinion you ought to be very thankful to me, but that will come later. We may count on you, then?

RAOUL. Oh, I suppose so. I shall forget my own worries for a little while. What do you want me to do?

PIERRE. You're the general, Suzanne. Give him his orders.

SUZANNE. I'll tell you what we want. We want to save Jean from his wife. [*The kitchen door opens a little.*] You've seen how she leads him by the nose.

RAOUL. Yes, and I've protested, too. It's disgusting. But what's to be done about it? Someone has to run the house. Do you think Jean could? He was born to be ordered around.

SUZANNE. Ordered around, perhaps, but not like a slave. He comes from the hill country. Our people were not meant to be slaves. We can't let that happen.

RAOUL. Well then, what are you going to do?

SUZANNE. Unless you have some better idea, we want you to help us in what we've been doing. We must talk to him as often as we can, earnestly and seriously, show him and help him to act like a man instead of a great beast of burden; make him act as master in his own house, as he ought to be.

RAOUL. It's doesn't matter how he acts, his actions have no real importance, at all. It's his ideas you want to change, and all the rest will follow. Ideas alone have power. Action is only a weak and watery reflection of thought. The idea, the idea, is everything.

SUZANNE. Then we'll change his ideas.

RAOUL. Impossible, at that age.

SUZANNE. Then what can we do?

RAOUL. Nothing, there is nothing to be done. There is no good in action.

SUZANNE. I don't believe it. You may do what you like, but I'm going to keep on.

RAOUL. It's no use.

SUZANNE. I don't believe it. You'll see. I'll change his actions and his thoughts will change too. Haven't you noticed any difference in him during the last week?

RAOUL. Yes, he often seemed in worse humour than I ever saw him before. I wondered if he had taken sick.

SUZANNE. Far from it. He's just getting well. He's beginning to lose that shameful mildness he had when he'd let anybody walk all over him that wanted to. I don't think he's ever made any unreasonable demands.

PIERRE. Of course you don't. You prompted them all.

SUZANNE. And what if I did? Why shouldn't I? You have to hold a child by the hand until he learns to walk alone. But it will turn out all right. Time and patience, that's all we need. You'll see, Lisette isn't so formidable.

PIERRE. Oh yes, I'll admit you're worth a couple of hundred Lisettes, if that's any comfort to you. But is that enough?

RAOUL. You're wrong, madame. It's the mother you must attack, not Lisette. She's the one that really rules the house. I'm very glad that I'm an orphan.

[*The door opens a little wider.*]

PIERRE. He's right, my dear. Just because she's good to you, and flatters you a little, you've let her off too easy. She's the one that first taught him submission, and made it a habit. Jean isn't a son to her any longer, only an unusually docile and dependable servant. It's her power that has to be uprooted first.

SUZANNE. Well, I can do it. Much as I admire her and respect her, I feel sure I can do it, and I'm going to. Remember, he was very fond of me once. That isn't easily forgotten, you know. I'm not ugly yet. We'll see which has the greater power, his mother or I.

PIERRE. Great heavens! Have you no conscience?

SUZANNE. Not to bother me. Just wait and we'll see.

[*The door is thrown wide open and* MME. GUICHET *enters.*]

MME. GUICHET [*at the door*]. I was listening. Such clumsy conspirators! Don't even shut the door. I suspected some such plot quite a while ago, and I've been watching its progress with very great interest. [*There is an uneasy silence.*] Well, Mr. Thankful Orphan, do you think this soulless Suzanne would have more influence over my son than I would?

RAOUL. No, I can't believe it.

MME. GUICHET. And you, Mr. Man-with-a-conscience?

PIERRE. I'm afraid she wouldn't.

SUZANNE. Traitor!

MME. GUICHET. Then, you're both wrong, she would. I *know* my son, at least, Pierre, even if I don't love him.

SUZANNE. Then, it's not worth your while to oppose me. It would be useless.

MME. GUICHET. No, I'm not going to resist.

PIERRE. Ouf! Breathe freely, poor heart!

MME. GUICHET. That isn't all. If you're willing to let me, I'll try to help you.

PIERRE. Help us? You?

SUZANNE. Oh, madame, will you? That leaves only Lisette to fight. We're sure to win now.

PIERRE. Poor Lisette!

MME. GUICHET. Ever since I suspected, I've been wondering whether you were right, whether I might have been too strict with him. It's true that I've always had the habit of ordering people around, and perhaps I've indulged it a little too much. If I've been mistaken, I meant it for the best. It was not just unkindness to my oldest son. Still, if Jean would be happier with more freedom, let him have it. If it doesn't work, I can soon put him in his place again after you leave. Talk of something else now. I think I hear someone coming. Hurry up, don't stand there as if you were all dumb. Talk!

RAOUL. What about?

MME. GUICHET. Anything at all, only talk, stupid!

PIERRE. Give ear, O earth, while I renew the praises of Suzanne, a tale that never wearies nor grows old.

MME. GUICHET. Pay attention, now, you happy young orphan, and you may be able to pick up some pretty things to say to Renée.

PIERRE. Lo, I begin.

MME. GUICHET. It's about time. You haven't mentioned the subject for fully twenty-two minutes.

PIERRE. I won't. It's too late. I've missed my turn. I'll have to wait eighteen minutes more.

RAOUL. Don't leave me, will you, if she comes?

SUZANNE. She? Oh, your mother-in-law, you mean?

MME. GUICHET. His what?

PIERRE. He means Mme. Dulac. She is bound she'll get him for Annette.

MME. GUICHET. But that's ridiculous, when Renée is here.

PIERRE. I wish I could be sure. I'm beginning to be sorry I ever started the business. But I thought he surely had some sense.

MME. GUICHET. Well, if he does make an utter fool of himself, he'll never get another cent from me. But surely there can't be any danger.

[*The door opens,* MME. DULAC, ANNETTE, RENÉE, LISETTE, *and* JEAN *enter.*]

LISETTE [*speaking as she enters*]. Danger? What danger?

MME. GUICHET. What's that?

LISETTE. What were you saying there was no danger of?

MME. GUICHET. Oh, of the dam breaking.

LISETTE. I should think not. [*To* PIERRE] My father built the big dam, you know, a few miles up stream, about the same time he built this house. Nobody could live here before that. Every fall and spring when

the rains come, the river used to cover all this low ground for miles around. He was a great traveller, my father was. He was a clever man, and he'd seen a lot. He built a big dam that only lets the water pass little by little, so that it can't hurt anything. You'll have to go and see it. It's worth the trouble. Big planks, that wide, and beams . . . .

MME. DULAC. Yes, it's certainly a wonderful thing. I've seen it.

PIERRE. If anything were to happen to it in the stormy season . . . .

LISETTE. It would be the end of us, that's all, unless we were warned in time. It was my father himself, who built it, when he was living.

SUZANNE. I don't know. I don't think I'd like to live here under those conditions.

LISETTE. Everyone has his own tastes. There's no better land anywhere around, and so long as you're not afraid . . . . It looks as if these backwoods people haven't all the courage there is. Take my father . . . .

JEAN. Oh, give your father a rest. He's a bigger nuisance dead than he was alive.

LISETTE. Jean! Whatever's the matter with you? You're forgetting yourself. What's got into you lately?

JEAN. What do you mean?

LISETTE. That sulky, bad tempered way of talking. It isn't a bit like you. What harm did my father ever do you?

JEAN. He didn't do me any harm. I never said he did. Only you don't need to go dragging him into the talk by the heels every chance you get.

LISETTE. Really, I don't know what's got into him. He's not a bit like this as a rule. You'll have to pardon him.

JEAN. Oh, I hope it isn't bothering . . . . I wouldn't like to trouble . . . .

LISETTE. But to talk like that about my father, after him leaving us this farm and all. Is that what you call

gratitude? You know right well that if it hadn't been for him you'd still be back there in the bush, scratching away at a thin patch of dirt between big rusty rocks and tree stumps, and bringing in every year a little bit of a crop, hardly enough to keep soul and body together till next harvest.

JEAN. Oh, no, no . . . . still . . . . now and again. . . . I miss the back country.

LISETTE. I thought you'd outgrown that silliness. It's all right for little babies to go around sighing and sobbing like the wind in the corners of an old house, but a man your age ought to have got over it long ago. Aren't you ashamed of yourself?

JEAN. Yes, you're right. I'll try to do better.

SUZANNE. But why should people want to forget such things? I know I have only to close my eyes to see the big, round hills rising up all about me again, so near to me and so real that I almost think I could touch them, if I stretched out my hands. In the little cracks in the rock I can see ferns growing, waving in the wind, and stiff, stunted little bushes; and there are deep, black pools with reed-beds all around them, and long, slender rushes in a fringe, with dragonflies whirring and rustling and flashing across them.

JEAN. And the smooth rock-faces, with patches of dark moss and gray lichen all over them, and a little spring slipping down over the edge of them, so that the sun glitters and sparkles on the bare, wet rock; and all the thick, dark trees in the hollow places . . . .

LISETTE. Let's talk about something else, please. If he gets off on that track, we might as well say good-bye to him. Jean, you ought to be more careful. You are amusing yourself at other people's expense.

JEAN. I am very sorry. I hope they'll excuse . . . . I had no idea.

LISETTE. You see how it is. He gets carried away altogether as soon as he begins to talk about that sort of nonsense. He hasn't any control of himself. He's

too sensitive, that's what's wrong. I have done my best to harden him and keep him from vain and frivolous talk and ideas, and it's only once in a long while he forgets himself like that. It won't happen again for months after he comes to his senses.

JEAN. I wouldn't like to bother . . . .

LISETTE. All right, all right, we understand. But don't let it happen again. People will think you're crazy.

SUZANNE. I'm afraid it's my fault, really. I am the one that started it.

LISETTE. Oh, he has to get that nonsense out of his head, every once in a while. It does him good. After that he is more human. Perhaps he'll be in a better humour, now. He's been going around like a bear with a sore head for the last week. Why, he hasn't jumped on me like that for—five years, anyway—since the time he had the fever. Isn't that right, madame.

MME. GUICHET. Yes, it is.

LISETTE. I can't understand it. It isn't as if I had done anything to anger him, either. I only said that my father . . . .

MME. GUICHET. We don't need to go back over all that now. It won't amuse the others. After all, Jean isn't a machine, but a full-grown man. He has a right to some freedom. We sometimes forget that, I'm afraid.

LISETTE. No, madame, I don't. I know he's a man, but he's much more sensitive than most men are. He has to be watched and tied up like a delicate vine. That's what I do. You've seen plenty of good vines that could never stand up straight if they were left to themselves, they'd drag and trail all over the ground, getting their leaves and fruit all smudged with dust, or mud, depending on the weather. You have to prune a vine like that very carefully, and fasten it up to some strong support, or it will never come to anything. And with these sensitive men it's just the same.

MME. GUICHET. But you have to handle your sensitive vines pretty gently, don't you?

SUZANNE [*low to* PIERRE]. Isn't it horrible? Right in front of his face.

MME. GUICHET. What were you saying?

SUZANNE. I was just asking Pierre if he didn't think our ignorance was a horrible disgrace. Neither one of us knows the first thing about gardening. All that talk about vines is Greek to us. We admire the sound. But we can't make any sense out of it. Isn't it terrible? That's what comes of living in the city.

LISETTE. But you were born and brought up . . . .

SUZANNE. Oh, yes, away back there in the bush, where we had a little bit of wheat, and trees, and trees, and trees, and a few wild berries, but no vines at all. . . . . But just look at Raoul. Isn't he busy?

[RAOUL *has been reading in a low voice to* ANNETTE *and* RENÉE.]

MME. DULAC. That reminds me, I have got something to say to him.

SUZANNE. Don't interrupt him, listen. He's getting quite excited about something.

[RAOUL *closes the book and harangues* ANNETTE *and* RENÉE.]

RAOUL. You say human life is sacred. I defy you to prove it. It's no good just asserting it, or saying that so-and-so told you. That isn't proof. Why, just look at Nature. Would you say she accounts men valuable? She destroys them by thousands every day. All the elements join to plot his ruin. Fire burns him, water drowns him; if his body escapes their violence he loses the means of nourishing that body. Often the air and earth delight to suffocate him; sometimes the earth itself opens and swallows him alive, with alarming and terrible noises. Well then, if a man's life is not sacred

to Nature, why should it be to himself? He has the right and the duty to take his own life when such becomes necessary.

RENÉE. And when is that?

RAOUL. When longer life means more ill to himself and to his friends.

ANNETTE. Yes, but isn't it cowardly to try and avoid the afflictions that have been given us for our good? That's what I've always been told.

RAOUL. Then you've been told a lot of silly nonsense. It isn't a question of cowardice or courage at all. That argument is entirely out of place. It's merely a matter of what's useful.

RENÉE. But how is it useful to kill yourself while you still have enemies left? That's a silly idea. Better spend all the strength you have left in their destruction; go down fighting to the last and drag as many of them with you as you can. That would be more useful in my opinion.

ANNETTE. Why, Renée, what an idea!

RAOUL. That's only one case, though. What if you have no enemies?

RENÉE. While you live you have always enemies.

RAOUL [*opening his book*]. But consider again what Diogenes Laertius said about Spensippus and Hegesias.

LISETTE. That's enough. I won't have you trotting out any of your stupid old blockheads with outlandish names to support such crazy and heathenish ideas. I won't have it. Aren't you ashamed of yourself? One word more and you leave the room.

RAOUL. But it's . . . .

LISETTE. Not a word, I tell you, I won't have it in my house.

RAOUL. But . . . .

[LISETTE *rises and takes a step towards* RAOUL.]

MME. DULAC. Wait a minute! Before you leave the room, m'sieu, I want to ask you one question, here, in

front of everybody. I have asked you time and again when we were alone, and you have never given me any definite answer. I am tired of that. I insist on an answer. And you shan't leave this room till you say either one thing or the other. [*She is pursuing* RAOUL *around the stage as she speaks. He is shelterd from her by* PIERRE, *who walks between them throwing up his hands in an exaggerated gesture.*] M'sieu, you are paying court at the same time with equal devotion to my daughter Annette, and to my niece Renée. I think I have the right to ask for an explanation of your conduct. I demand an answer, m'sieu. M'sieu, do you hear me? What are your intentions, m'sieu?

RAOUL. Oh, I shall go mad!

MME. DULAC. Answer me!

PIERRE. He has answered. He says he intends to go mad.

MME. DULAC. That wasn't my question. I want a clear and definite answer to what I asked him. I have spoken already to both your uncle and your aunt, m'sieu, and they have left the whole thing to you. What are you going to do about it? Make up your mind.

LISETTE. She's right. You've got to decide some time. Best do it now and get it over with.

RAOUL. But how can I, how can I?

PIERRE [*picking up two bits of thread*]. That's easy. Here, draw. Short thread, Annette; long one, Renée.

MME. DULAC. M'sieu, this is not a matter for joking. I am in earnest. I have the right to a serious answer.

RAOUL. But I don't want to get married.

MME. DULAC. That makes no difference. It doesn't mater what you want. Answer.

JEAN. I—I hope I'm not bothering, but—there's the army.

LISETTE. The army!

RAOUL. Oh, God bless you, uncle! You've saved me, you've saved me! I'll join the army to-morrow. Better

one swift and glorious battle now and again than a life-long siege, better the bonds that last a month, a year, two years, than those that last forever. I'll be a soldier, tra-la-la. Oh, uncle, how can I ever thank you?

LISETTE [*to* JEAN]. Whatever put that idea into your head? Don't you want the boy to get married? Perhaps you wish you hadn't married, yourself.

JEAN. Oh, no, no, no, by no means. Only, well, the idea just came to me and I spoke. That's all. I hope I'm not bothering.

RAOUL. I'm going to be a soldier! Hurrah! Hurrah, for death and glory!

ANNETTE. A soldier! Oh, dearest, don't do that! . . . Oh, what have I said?

PIERRE. You said, "A soldier! Oh, dearest, don't do that!"

ANNETTE. Oh, I shall die of shame.

RENÉE. Why, it's a splendid thing to do, Raoul. We'll all be proud of you. You can't be only a student all your life. A year in the field of honour, among so many brave and cunning men, and noble deeds, you'd come back a man a princess might be proud of.

MME. DULAC. If he's lucky enough to get back.

ANNETTE. Don't talk about it. It's horrible. It makes me shudder just to think of it.

RENÉE. If there were no danger, where would the honour be? When a man's time comes, he'll die just as sure skulking at home in bed, as on the field of battle. Only, he will have traded a glorious death for a base and ignoble one.

ANNETTE. Oh, don't go, Raoul.

PIERRE [*to* SUZANNE]. Shall we leave them?

JEAN. Lisette.

[PIERRE, SUZANNE, JEAN, LISETTE, *and* MME. GUICHET *go out.*]

MME. DULAC. Oh, m'sieu, are you cruel enough to break my poor girl's heart like that? I think it's my

duty to say what her modesty makes her hide, but can't you see that the poor thing is just distracted with love?

RAOUL. But what difference does that make, now? I'm going to be a soldier. She won't follow me to the camps, will she?

MME. DULAC. Mercy, no! The idea! But you don't have to be a soldier. Let others go and get themselves wounded and killed. You stay here and work the land with us, in peace. A soldier's life is a hard one. There is no kindness to be had from the officers, nor from the enemy, neither.

ANNETTE. Why do you have to go and be torn to pieces by cannon balls?

RENÉE. There's many a man that's gone off to the war and come back safe and sound out of the great world, after seeing all sorts of wonders. They meet brave men and cunning men, there, and go happily through great trials and dangers. The peril they face is a small enough price to pay for all the strength and confidence men get from it, and all they learn of far-away people and places. Ah, if I were only a man!

ANNETTE. That's what you ought to be, you cruel, heartless thing. Don't let her persuade you, Raoul. Don't go away to strange people and places. Who knows what might happen? She's got some grudge against you. She only wants you to find your death out there.

RENÉE. That isn't true. I want him to find out life.

ANNETTE. Life! Life, indeed! I know what you want. You'd like to see him wounded on the battlefield, all torn to pieces by the bullets, and with his bones poking out in splinters through sopping red rags. That's what you'd like. You'd laugh to see him rolling there in front of your feet, wouldn't you . . . .

RAOUL. Don't talk about such things, please, it isn't very comforting.

MME. DULAC. If you hate that much to hear about it, how would you like to see it, and feel it?

ANNETTE. Mamma, leave me alone, please. Listen to me, Raoul. You won't let yourself be tricked to your death by that bad woman, for all she's so cunning. You're a man; you've had an education; you know how to think things out. Show us that you're not to be fooled by fine and empty words.

RAOUL. But if I don't go and be a soldier, what am I to do?

ANNETTE. Do you have to be told that? Do I have to—

RENÉE. She talks about trickery, when every word she speaks is flattery and seduction! Yes, you are a man. Do glory, honour, pride, mean nothing to you? Oh, where are your eyes? Can't you see what happened to your uncle? Go out into the world, now, while you are young and free; then, come back, weaker in body, perhaps, but stout and strong of heart, worthy of anyone's respect and love.

ANNETTE. Don't pay any attention to her, Raoul. She knows she can't ever get you, and she's trying to spoil my chances, just out of spite. She wants to send you off where someone else will catch you, and you'll never come back—or too late, maybe.

RENÉE. Let him give his word, and it will never be too late.

RAOUL [*sitting, his head in his hands*]. Oh, I don't know what to do.

ANNETTE [*to* RENÉE]. You needn't talk. You don't love him. You want to send him to the war to get killed.

MME. DULAC. That's right.

RENÉE. It's not to you, nor your mother, either, that I answer for my actions or my feelings. Let him choose, now, and have no more quarrelling.

ANNETTE. I am satisfied. It's for you to choose, Raoul. Here we are. On one side, quiet, and ease,

and love, gentle and tender, and peaceful. On the other, suffering and trial, a haughty heart, ill to please, a life of endless labour and strain.

RENÉE. Enough talking. Choose.

[RAOUL *remains silent, not lifting his eyes.* RENÉE *stands firm as a statue.* ANNETTE *moves closer and closer to* RAOUL, *finally kneels beside him, and lifts her eyes to his. He embraces her.*]

RAOUL. Annette! It's you I love! I'll stay!

MME. DULAC. My son! [*She embraces* ANNETTE *and* RAOUL, *then turns to* RENÉE.] And now you can go back to the shack you came from. Much good it did you, trying to steal what belonged to my Annette, just for spite; that's all it was. See how you've come out of it. See! Another time you won't be in such a hurry to set yourself up against your betters. That'll teach you a lesson, eh? You, so proud, so haughty, thought yourself above us, didn't you? Oh, I'm so glad to see you thrown aside like an old shoe. I could have told you so. Pride goes before a fall.

RENÉE. I am going home. There is no need of insult.

MME. DULAC. Aha! That stung, didn't it? Such impudence! To think you could rival my Annette in the eyes of a man! What do you know about men?

RENÉE. That they are less noble than I had thought —almost the equal of some women.

MME. DULAC. None of your insults, young woman, or . . . .

RENÉE. None of your threats, madame, I can play that game too.

MME. DULAC. Do it then, do it. I dare you to do it. I'd like to hear the threats you'd make.

RENÉE. What's the use of brawling like this. Good-bye. I shall be gone when you get home.

MME. DULAC. Going to run off before I get away,

and tell your uncle, eh? You think he'll take your part against his own daughter.

RENÉE. Say good-bye for me to the others.

MME. DULAC. They'll be glad to see you gone. Oh, won't they have fun over this? Won't M'sieu Beauregard laugh?

RENÉE. No, he will not.

MME. DULAC. Won't he? That's all you know. You should have heard what he said the other day, when he saw you and Annette together, how he made fun of you.

RENÉE. I don't believe it.

MME. DULAC. Call him in and ask him then, if you don't believe it. Call him in and I'll ask him. Then you'll see.

RENÉE. He, too? I didn't think he would.

MME. DULAC. That's it. Skulk away, you brave warrior! You're a fine one to talk about battles. Here you are running away beaten at night, on foot. Where is all the glory and honour you made such a fuss about?

RENÉE. Madame, I don't want to lose my temper.

MME. DULAC. Look at Raoul. He doesn't know you exist.

RENÉE [*in a blaze of anger*]. *But he shall know it!*

MME. DULAC. You'll come back and dance at the wedding, won't you.

RENÉE. Never again in this life will any of you see me; but I'll send some friends to dance at the wedding with you. You'll see them dancing gaily, gaily down from the dam, all with their white lace caps on their heads, down by the river, to bring you news of me.

MME. DULAC. We'll be very grateful to you, I'm sure.

RENÉE. It's good of you to welcome like that the bringers of ill news, the bringers of news of death.

MME. DULAC. What do you mean by that?

RENÉE. Ask *them.*

[*She goes out and slams the door. The curtain falls.*]

ACT III

SCENE.—*The same. Two weeks later.*

MME. DULAC. What a happy day this is for all of us, isn't it? I am sure I never dreamt of such a thing when Raoul came back from the city three months ago to stay with his aunt and uncle. Isn't it odd? He came here an orphan, and now he's found a wife, and a father and mother, too.

SUZANNE. But why hasn't your husband come to the celebration?

MME. DULAC. Oh, he's been sulking and bad-tempered for three or four days now. He says he's sick. I don't know what's the matter with him, and I don't care. He is a nuisance to everybody when he gets like that. Best thing to do is just to leave him to himself till he comes to himself.

PIERRE. Bravo!

MME. DULAC. What?

PIERRE. That's excellent. I congratulate you. Leave him to himself till he comes back to himself. That's delicate, that's subtle.

MME. DULAC [*not understanding*]. Oh. When Lisette spoke about having the celebration here instead of at our place, I didn't feel like refusing. Besides, this house is so much larger than ours. You'll see a big difference, Raoul, when you leave this for that little cottage you bought from the Lenoirs.

MME. GUICHET. How nice of him to set up house so near his new mother.

MME. DULAC. Yes, oh yes, of course. We thought he'd go back to the city, though, a scholar like him.

Annette counted on that a good deal. She was so anxious to see the city.

JEAN. He told you his reason. Aren't you satisfied?

MME. DULAC. Why yes, we're very happy to have him so near us. And then, as you say, he gave us his reasons.

MME. GUICHET. Partly, at any rate.

MME. DULAC. I don't understand.

MME. GUICHET. I could tell you some he didn't—some he doesn't know himself, perhaps.

MME. DULAC. I don't know what you mean.

MME. GUICHET. Well, for example, he that falls down one step rarely stops at that.

MME. DULAC. You are too deep for my poor brain, madame.

MME. GUICHET. Then, try this; perhaps you will find it easier. I wonder if Raoul told you yet that when he married he lost half the money he expected to have.

MME. DULAC. Why, no. He never said a word about it. Is that true?

MME. GUICHET. It is, I know it for a certainty.

MME. DULAC. But how did it happen?

MME. GUICHET. An old relative refused to leave him anything at all of what she had promised him, because she didn't like his marriage.

MME. DULAC. Oh, how wicked! The idea! I can't imagine anybody being so mean. What difference did it make to her, the old villain! She didn't want to marry him, herself, did she? I think it's a mean, dirty trick.

MME. GUICHET. Isn't it?

MME. DULAC. What reason did she have, anyway? Did she think my Annette wasn't good enough to suit her?

MME. GUICHET. I believe she had something like that in her mind.

MME. DULAC. The impudence of her, the shameless impudence!

MME. GUICHET. That's just the word to use. I know her quite well. She's my very best friend in fact.

MME. DULAC. I don't care. I won't take back a single word. Indeed, I pity you, madame, for having such a friend, and I advise you to break away from her as soon as you can.

MME. GUICHET. I can't very well do that.

MME. DULAC. Oh, if I could only just tell her a few things to her face!

MME. GUICHET. Tell them to me and she'll hear them all.

MME. DULAC. Thank you, madame, but that isn't what I wanted. I'd just like to meet the old thief once and for all, face to face, I'd tell her a thing or two.

MME. GUICHET. What if I were to tell you now that I am the guilty person?

JEAN. Mamma, that will do! You've gone far enough. Be quiet.

MME. GUICHET. Why, Jean, what's the matter with you? Talk like that to me, your mother? Are you mad? Never in my life have I heard you talk like that to me.

SUZANNE. Shame on you!

MME. DULAC. Shame, shame.

PIERRE. Suzanne, a farmer once let a bull out of a field, and then couldn't get him back.

JEAN. I'm sorry, mother. I beg your pardon. My head hurts sometimes terribly. Everything seems to be buzzing and whirling around inside. I hardly know what I am saying or doing.

MME. DULAC. It's the excitement of the celebration that's exciting you, m'sieu. I know I feel all upside down, myself. Sometimes I hardly know whether I'm on my head or my heels, I'm so excited.

PIERRE. You ought to go and have yourself bled. That's very good for headaches.

JEAN. It's rest, I need, I think.

SUZANNE. You'll be able to rest better after the wedding when Annette and Raoul have gone away.

MME. DULAC. I'm not altogether pleased with Raoul. He should have told us that he lost his money.

MME. GUICHET. Everything would have turned out differently, then, eh?

MME. DULAC. No, of course not. That wouldn't have made any difference. Only he ought to have trusted us that much. Not just said that he was tired of studying, that a farmer's life is simple and healthy, and that he didn't want to take Annette too far from her mother. That's all true enough, I don't doubt, and it does him credit, too, but he might have given us a little more of his confidence, I think.

SUZANNE. You're quite right. I think it's disgraceful. I never expected it of him.

MME. DULAC. After all, though, it isn't his fault, as much as that bad woman's—the old thief, that's all she is, stealing what was his by right. What does she want with all her money, anyway? What good is it going to do her? I hope she never gets another bit of satisfaction out of it as long as she lives. May the good God forget her, living and dead. I know you were just making fun of me, madame, when you said you were the one that had done it.

MME. GUICHET [*dryly*]. You are quite right. I was making fun of you.

MME. DULAC. I could see that. After all, what reason could you have for not liking the match? I'm sure Annette has always been as nice to you as she could.

MME. GUICHET. People are terribly ungrateful in this world.

MME. DULAC. That's a fact. Just look at that niece of mine, for example. But you're not like that, madame; you wouldn't stand in the way of my poor girl's happiness like that, I know.

SUZANNE. She seems to be fairly happy just now, anyway.

MME. DULAC. Yes, just look at them. Isn't it lovely to see them so contented and happy.

PIERRE. Better be a pig contented, they say, than Socrates discontented.

MME. DULAC. I don't know what sort of thing a Socrates is, but I know you're quite right there. Contentment is everything, that's what I've always said. Isn't it Annette? [ANNETTE *pays no attention.*] Hein! Is she gone? Annette! Why didn't you answer me?

ANNETTE. I didn't know you were talking to me. What did you want?

MME. DULAC. I asked you—let's see, what was it I wanted? I forget. Oh, well, it doesn't matter, nothing important.

ANNETTE. Then don't bother me again, please, about nothing important.

MME. DULAC [*taken aback*]. What?

PIERRE. Aha, she's married; she's getting independent. That's what you've got to expect.

MME. DULAC. Why, it—it takes my breath away.

SUZANNE. She didn't mean it that way, I'm sure. She's just too excited to think what she's saying. I wonder if there'll be many people here for the evening? I hope the rain doesn't keep them all away.

MME. DULAC. I haven't seen anything yet of those friends my precious niece promised to send to the wedding.

SUZANNE. What friends do you mean?

MME. DULAC. When she went away, I invited her to come back to the celebration, if she really had to go in such a hurry as she said she did; and she told me, pretty rudely, too, that she wouldn't stir a foot to come herself, but she'd send a lot of her friends to dance with us.

MME. GUICHET. That's queer.

PIERRE. Ah, let them come, let them come; they'll be as welcome as May flowers in November. The girls down here, most of them, are a little—a little chilly,

shall I say? Since Renée left, I'm starting to tire a little even of this marvellous creature, [*pointing to* SUZANNE] whose lashes are a net of charms, a palisade of lances; and Annette has the bad taste to pay not the least bit of attention to me when Raoul is around. But let them come, these others, and we'll show them what dancing is, eh Raoul? He doesn't hear a word I'm saying, the blockhead. My treasure, was I ever like that?

SUZANNE. Never, my love; you were always watching the audience out of the corner of your eye.

PIERRE. I was? I don't believe it. I refuse to accept the decision. I will carry the case to a higher court. What a horrible idea!

SUZANNE. But I thought that was the answer you wanted.

PIERRE [*playfully*]. Oh you stupid thing! [*To* MME. GUICHET] Do you think I ever carried on like Raoul? It's no use asking Suzanne. She mixes up all sorts of irrelevant insults with her answer. I am counting on you, now, to tell the truth without bringing in any frivolous and abominable accusations. Do you think I was ever as madly in love as Raoul?

MME. GUICHET. Probably—never.

PIERRE. Ah, if Renée were only here to throw you both out of the window! Let's hope her friends come, though, if Raoul won't look at them, Jean and I will show them how to dance. He'll throw to the rooks and the ravens that shaggy, solemn pose he's been wrapping himself up in, and we'll be the merriest little company in the whole, wide world.

SUZANNE. But would they be likely to come, weather like this? It's been raining all evening. Where are they coming from, do you know, or how are they coming?

MME. DULAC. She said they were going to start from the dam.

MME. GUICHET. From the dam! I don't like that.

I am afraid there's something more to that than shows on the surface.

MME. DULAC. I think so, too. I'll tell you what I think. [LISETTE *enters from the kitchen.*] Are you sure we can't help you with something, Lisette?

SUZANNE. Yes, isn't there some way we could be useful?

LISETTE. No, thank you. Everything's ready. [LISETTE, *finding* JEAN *in her way, as he sits in front of the cupboard, shakes him sharply by the shoulder.*] Get out of my way. Move.

[JEAN *leaps to his feet, raising his hand as if to strike her. She shrinks back with a frightened cry.* RAOUL *steps between them.* JEAN *sends him rolling on the floor.*]

JEAN. Keep out of this, boy!

SUZANNE. But Jean . . .

JEAN. Silence! This is my affair. [*To* LISETTE] Don't try to run away.

LISETTE. I'm not trying to run away. Come, come, get out of the road and let me get that bowl.

JEAN. Be a bit less hasty, and more mannerly, or you won't get that bowl or any other. You will be thrown out in the rain to cool off. Do you understand?

LISETTE. Why, Jean!

JEAN. I mean it.

LISETTE. Don't be silly. Get out of my road and let me get the bowl.

JEAN [*raising his arm*]. Remember, I warned you.

LISETTE. Jean! . . . You wouldn't . . . hit me!

JEAN. Oh, wouldn't I!

LISETTE. No! You wouldn't. You daren't hit me. I'm not afraid of you . . . you daren't hit me.

JEAN. I'm not going to be ordered about like an animal.

LISETTE. I'm not going to be beaten like a brute beast. Keep your hands off me.

JEAN. And you keep your hands off me after this. If you want me to do anything for you, you'll ask me like a Christian, do you hear? [*He shakes her by the arm.*]

LISETTE. Jean, let go. You are hurting me. You big brute! [*She strikes him in the face.*]

JEAN [*grasping her with both hands*]. What! You would?

MME. GUICHET. Jean!

JEAN [*to* LISETTE]. You think I wouldn't, eh? I don't dare, eh?

LISETTE. I'm not afraid of you.

[*They look at each other in silence for a moment, then* JEAN *releases her.*]

JEAN. Oh, well, take your bowl and go.

[LISETTE *takes the bowl and goes to the kitchen in silence.*]

PIERRE. By Jove, cousin, you've certainly shown us all who's master in this house. You're an excellent actor. I'd never have suspected it. I confess that for the moment, I was afraid.

MME. DULAC. I was scared stiff. Every hair on my head was standing up.

PIERRE. And poor Raoul! What a misfortune to be bowled over like that the very day of his wedding. That's a sad outlook for his married life.

JEAN. Let him mind his own business, then.

PIERRE. Why, Jean, what's the matter? Don't carry a joke too far.

JEAN. It isn't a joke. Leave me alone.

SUZANNE. But Jean . . .

JEAN. Be quiet, I tell you. I'll look after my own affairs. When I want anybody's advice I'll say so.

[JEAN *sits down on the steps before the door, fingering an axe.*]

PIERRE [*aside*]. He's extremely amiable this evening, isn't he?

ANNETTE. If he lifts a finger against Raoul again, I'll tear the eyes out of his head. Such a way to act! I never heard of the like. Did you hurt yourself, Raoul? Are you bruised?

RAOUL. No, no, it's nothing; he took me by surprise, that's all.

MME. DULAC. As I was saying about Renée . . .

SUZANNE. Renée! What do you mean? Who was talking about Renée?

MME. DULAC. A couple of minutes ago, before I was interrupted, I was going to say that I know what Renée meant by those queer things she said when she left.

MME. GUICHET. Do you remember the exact words?

MME. DULAC. No, but it was something like this. She said I'd never see her alive, but she'd send me news by some friends of hers with white caps, that were going to come down by way of the dam.

SUZANNE. And you think that means?

MME. DULAC. I think she meant she was going to drown herself, and wants her funeral procession to come down and upset us in the middle of the wedding. That's what she wants. It's just the sort of dirty trick she'd do.

PIERRE. Oh, no, that's horrible. I can't believe it.

MME. GUICHET. She might.

MME. DULAC. Well, just let them try it. They'll be wasting their time, that's all. We can easily shut the door and leave them outside in the rain to cool off. They won't stay long.

SUZANNE. But I can't believe Renée would do such a thing. She left in a hurry, I know, and I was surprised till you explained; and perhaps she was a little upset at the time, but she has too much sense to——. Oh, it's a horrible idea!

PIERRE. It's devilish. Renée? No, never.

MME. DULAC. You don't know her. She can put up

a fine pretence in front of people, all right. But I've seen her close to, as she really is. I know how cunning and deceitful and spiteful she is. I never said anything about it, but you should have heard the things she said to Annette and me just before she left. It would make you blush to listen to her. Yes, and it would make you tremble, too. She was just like a wild beast.

PIERRE. It's hard to believe that. I was fond of Renée.

SUZANNE. So was I, very fond of her.

ANNETTE. For goodness' sake, can't you talk of anything but Renée. Renée all evening! And I hate the very sound of the name! I want to forget about her altogether.

SUZANNE. But I thought you were such good friends.

ANNETTE. So we were, too, till she tried to steal my Raoul away from me, in that low, sneaking way she has, the dirty little cheat! She was just mad because he wouldn't even look sideways at her, and just for that she wanted to send him off to the army to get killed. The sneaking, underhand thief!

RAOUL. But she didn't succeed, after all. There is no use holding spite.

ANNETTE. I don't see why you have to stick up for her, after her trying to kill you.

RAOUL. I wasn't sticking up for her. Only . . .

ANNETTE. What were you doing, then, in such a mild little voice?

RAOUL. Well, but don't you see, after all, she . . .

ANNETTE. Oh, I know what you're going to say. She's the one you really wanted, after all, isn't she? All right, why didn't you go to the army then, if you were so anxious about her? You can't say I held you back.

RAOUL. No, no, I didn't mean anything of the sort. You know I didn't care a bit about her. At least, not the the same as you.

ANNETTE. Oh, you mean you cared more? Think I didn't know it all along? But it's too late now. You should have thought of that before. It's no use regretting your choice now.

RAOUL. But I don't regret it. I never said I did. You're not fair.

ANNETTE. Do you hear what he says? Not fair? And I saved his life. That's gratitude! Not fair? Is that the way a man ought to talk to his wife on their very wedding night? Oh, Raoul! [*She breaks into tears.*]

RAOUL [*kneeling beside her*]. There, there, darling, don't cry. I didn't mean it. I'm just a big brute. I'm a beast. Tell me you forgive me. I shouldn't have talked like that. Say you forgive me.

ANNETTE. Oh, how meek and easy-going I am! Yes, Raoul, I forgive you; though those cruel words of yours cut me to the heart. I forgive you. But you don't miss Renée now, do you?

RAOUL. I never cared that for her. If ever I thought I did, I assure you it was only the blind infatuation of youth and inexperience. I didn't know what love meant.

ANNETTE. And you're not going to worry any more about her.

RAOUL. I won't even mention her name again. After all, you know, it wasn't I that started it this time.

ANNETTE. That's as much as to say that I'm to blame for dragging her in. Ah! I hate her like the gates of hell!

MME. DULAC. Annette! Such language!

ANNETTE. Shut up! [*To* RAOUL] Is that reasonable, now? My goodness, what a fool you are sometimes! You almost make me lose my temper.

JEAN. See, they're quarrelling already. They don't need any relatives.

PIERRE. Behold, Sir Oracle has broken silence as an

oracle should, in terms very obvious and very obscure.

JEAN. M'sieu, if you wish to insult me . . . ?

PIERRE. You are insulting yourself, by supposing you haven't wit enough to recognize wit.

JEAN. I have enough to recognize malice.

PIERRE. But you are not keeping up the parallel as you should. You ought to say that you have enough malice in you to recognize malice.

JEAN. I see you are bent on insulting me.

PIERRE. I never insult anybody. I speak as a philosopher, and everybody jumps at once to the idea that I'm a swaggering bully. I deal in pretty generalities, and everybody applies them to himself, and comes after me with a club instead of mending his ways, or else using the club on himself for offering himself personal insults. I never libel anybody but the whole human race. In the long run, it's less dangerous.

JEAN. M'sieu speaks in the proper way, in terms half obscure, and half very obvious.

PIERRE [*somewhat sharply*]. If my words seem obscure, that isn't my fault. The listener may impute that to the defects of his own intelligence.

SUZANNE. Pierre!

PIERRE. You're right, my pearl of pearls. I was forgetting the calm and dignity that befit the philosopher. I'm very sorry. I beg your pardon, cousin. Ah, my dear, if it weren't for your sweet and tranquil influence, beyond a doubt I'd be a terrible brawler, the dread and envy of a dozen parishes. I'm sure of it. One look at me, and all men would die of fright and all women of love. What a career!

SUZANNE. A little lonely, I am afraid.

PIERRE. A solitude divine! I'm rather sorry I didn't choose it.

JEAN. M'sieu would have had great success, no doubt, since he is so much afraid to give an account of the three little words he addressed to me.

PIERRE [*with anger*]. Sapristi!

MME. GUICHET. Jean! I'm ashamed of you. If you can't talk like a sensible man you don't need to talk at all. It's the will of God that sick people have to suffer, but not that they make others suffer.

JEAN. Is it the will of God that other people are to insult them as much as they like?

MME. GUICHET. Nobody was insulting you. If you had been in your proper health, you'd have seen that Pierre was only making one of his usual jokes, and you wouldn't have made yourself ridiculous in front of everybody.

JEAN. Ridiculous? Mother . . .

MME. GUICHET. You might as well drop that high and mighty tone, Jean my boy, don't try to scare me. I know you too well for that. And what's more, if you don't mend your manners, and be quick about it too, I'll send you from the room.

JEAN. Mother, remember that I am no longer a child to obey without question or hesitation everything you say. I am a man.

MME. GUICHET. That for you men! You're still my son. Let's see you try to disobey me just once, and see what happens.

JEAN. But a man shouldn't do everything he's told without question. He has the right to make use of his reason. It is not only a right, but a duty.

MME. GUICHET. Yes, you've learnt your lesson well. I congratulate you. You know it by heart. But if your reason doesn't tell you that you'd better do what I order you to do without too much dilly-dallying about it, well then, you'll have to learn that over again, too.

SUZANNE. But, madame . . .

MME. GUICHET. My dear Suzanne, you'll have the kindness to be quiet, and keep out of this. I'm running this battle. And now, my son, do you think you can behave yourself as you ought to?

JEAN. Yes, mamma, I'll try.

MME. GUICHET. Good. What did we get so worked up about, anyway? Do you know, Suzanne? Was it only an affair of honour?

SUZANNE. Quarrelling seems to be in the air this evening, I don't know why.

[LISETTE *comes to the door and says humbly.*]

LISETTE. Jean, will you please go to the well, and get me a pail of water? It's raining and I don't want to leave the fire.

[JEAN *takes the pail, throws a coat over his shoulder, and goes out.*]

SUZANNE. Are you sure we can't help you about something?

LISETTE. Never mind, thanks. Sit down. Everything's ready.

[*She closes the door and returns to the kitchen.*]

PIERRE. Ah, the sun of merriment may shine again, now that Jean has taken his clouds away. It's a queer sort of celebration we've had so far, isn't it? You must admit that our excellent cousin is not the most amusing company in the world when he has a headache.

MME. DULAC. He hasn't been a bit like himself all week. He's been sulky and savage every day, and he's getting worse instead of better. Perhaps, it wouldn't be very hard, either, to say who is the most to blame for it.

PIERRE. Let's stop blaming. Let's all be merry, as people ought to be on a wedding-night. At least till Jean comes back.

MME. DULAC. Do you think people can be merry just by wanting to?

PIERRE. Surely. The will makes the way. Just try it.

SUZANNE. And the neighbours will be starting to come any minute now. Just think, if they come in, in the midst of a dead silence . . . .

MME. GUICHET. Or one of our pitched battles.

SUZANNE. Yes, what would they say?

PIERRE. Something witty, I'll wager. Ah, these neighbours of yours! Such charming folk! I'm sorry we'll have to leave them so soon. I've never met any in the city half so sound and light of heart. The sturdy way they make a joke of their misfortunes, and get all the more fun out of them. It's admirable.

[*During the scene the storm has increased in violence. There are occasional flashes of lightning and sounds of distant thunder. During lulls in the conversation the rain is heard against the window.*
The door opens and JEAN *comes in.*]

JEAN. Mon dieu! What a rain! The river is starting to come up again. [*He crosses with a pail of water to the kitchen door and goes out.*]

SUZANNE. Wouldn't it be terrible if the dam should break on a night like this?

MME. DULAC. Oh, there's no fear of that, it's all right. It won't break. It's lasted more than twenty years already and not a sign of weakening. A big strong thing like that I don't think would ever break down, unless some man destroyed it on purpose.

JEAN [*entering from the kitchen*]. Or some woman.

MME. DULAC. What do you mean by that?

JEAN. Oh, nothing, nothing. I was just filling out the phrase, that's all. Only, I know these up-country men—and women.

MME. DULAC. What's that got to do with it?

PIERRE. You surely don't think . . . .

LISETTE [*off*]. Jean!

JEAN [*going to the kitchen; saying from force of habit*]. I hope I'm not bothering . . . .

[*There is lightning and thunder off-stage.*]

LISETTE [*off*]. Lift this for me.

SUZANNE. What did he mean? The people up there wouldn't have any reason . . . .

MME. DULAC. I don't think he knows himself what he means. He makes me sick, always dunning away at his up-country people. My goodness, you'd think they were something wonderful to hear some folk talk, something more than human. Think I don't know them, too? I should say I do, and, with the exception of you two, I don't know any of them that's got the sense of a duck. Nothing but ideas, and emotions. Always flying off about some little thing. I beg your pardon, for talking like that, but it makes me mad.

[*There is a noise of falling crockery in the kitchen.*]

SUZANNE. What's that?

[SUZANNE *and* MME. DULAC *move towards the kitchen door, but stop on hearing* LISETTE'S *voice.*]

LISETTE [*off*]. My best bowl! My goodness, you are clumsy. Can't you look what you're doing? Such a mess!

PIERRE. Thunderstorm in the kitchen, too.

LISETTE [*off*]. Get a rag, quick, and wipe it up. Did you ever see such an awkward person. Hurry up, now!

PIERRE. Listen to that, Raoul. See what's ahead of you.

LISETTE [*off*]. Get a move on, stupid. What are you standing there for, like a big blockhead. [*A note of terror comes into her voice.*] *Jean! What are you . . . Oh! Mon Dieu!* DON'T! . . . . OH—!!

[LISETTE *gives a piercing scream which is cut short. The others listen stupefied. Heavy sounds come from the kitchen.* PIERRE *and* RAOUL *move cautiously towards the door,* SUZANNE *following, speaking in a low voice.*]

SUZANNE. What's the matter?

[*Suddenly the door swings wide open and* JEAN *appears.*]

JEAN [*speaking in a slow, hard voice as if dazed*]. I have — — strangled my wife. [*There is a movement of horror.* PIERRE *and* RAOUL *advance on* JEAN. *With a gesture, he halts them.*] *Back!* [*They draw back before him as he walks toward the outer door. Turning on the threshold he speaks.*] Stay there. Don't follow me.

[*He goes out. As the door opens there is a vivid flash of lightning followed almost immediately by a crash of thunder. Heavy rain is blown in through the open door.* MME. DULAC *and* ANNETTE *break into hysterical weeping.* RAOUL *stands bewildered, helpless.* MME. GUICHET *goes to the kitchen.* SUZANNE *throws herself into* PIERRE'S *arms, crying.*]

SUZANNE. Oh, Pierre, what have I done? I have killed her. Oh, why did I ever meddle in it?

PIERRE. Hush, my dear. It wasn't your fault. You did it all for the best. Nobody could have foreseen this. Don't distress yourself.

SUZANNE. I have done murder!

PIERRE. You mustn't blame yourself. Jean is mad. He doesn't know what he is doing.

SUZANNE. That's my fault too. Oh, why did I ever meddle with him?

[MME. GUICHET *returns. They all turn to her. She nods and turns away.*]

MME. DULAC. It's a good thing he didn't attack us.

SUZANNE. He ought to have. We're the ones he ought to have killed, not her.

MME. DULAC. Speak for yourself. My conscience is clear.

SUZANNE. Oh, Pierre, what have I done?

MME. DULAC. It's very sad. I wonder what Jean will do.

SUZANNE. Oh, what does that matter now?

MME. DULAC. It's a very sad thing, but if Jean were to kill himself now, as madmen usually do, I suppose the land would all come to Raoul, unless, of course, the grandmother . . . .

SUZANNE. Oh, stop!

MME. DULAC. Well, you've got to think about that sort of thing.

[*Suddenly the outer door opens, and* JEAN *appears.*]

JEAN. *The flood! The flood! She's broken the dam!*

MME. GUICHET. *Renée!*

JEAN. Don't I know my people?

[*After a momentary petrifaction everyone rushes towards the door. The candle is knocked over and goes out, leaving the stage in semi-darkness.* PIERRE *leads, shouting.*]

PIERRE. This way!

[JEAN *seizes an axe to bar the way. The red light of the fire shines on him as he stands in the doorway.*]

JEAN. *Keep back! We stay with Lisette.*

[PIERRE *and* RAOUL *push toward the door again.* JEAN *raises the axe menacingly. They recoil.*]

PIERRE. Isn't it lucky that we're not cats? They hate the water so.

[*There are sounds off-stage of the flood rushing towards the house as the curtain falls.*]

TRESPASSERS

A Comedy in Three Acts

BY

LESLIE REID

CHARACTERS

Sir Benjamin Parlowe, M.P.
Ruth Parlowe [*his wife*].
Ernest Parlowe [*his son*].
Faith Concord [*Ruth Parlowe's sister*].
Netta Montgomery.
Matthew Mumberson.
Luke Whitley.
Albert Pewson.
Bolton [*a butler*].
Meadows [*a maidservant*].

The First Production of TRESPASSERS took place in Hart House Theatre in May, 1923, with the following Cast:

Sir Benjamin Parlowe, M.P.	H. E. Hitchman
Ruth Parlowe - - - -	Margaret Tytler
Ernest Parlowe - - -	Wallace House
Faith Concord - - - -	Frances Rostance
Netta Montgomery - -	Madeleine Galbraith
Matthew Mumberson - -	Basil Loughrane
Luke Whitley - - - -	Raymond Card
Albert Pewson - - - -	J. W. MacDonald
Bolton - - - - - - - -	E. A. Dale
Meadows - - - - - -	Margaret Robertson

TRESPASSERS

ACT I

The scene is the well-furnished library of SIR BENJAMIN PARLOWE. *It is summer time. The French windows at the back are wide open showing a well kept garden. Bookshelves are on either side of the windows. Down right is an open fireplace. There are deep leather armchairs and a small leather sofa. The room is pervaded with an air of luxurious comfort.*

BOLTON *is discovered on a step-ladder standing outside the French windows. He is busy hanging a device of welcome over the windows. Neither the sign nor the upper part of* BOLTON *is visible to the audience.*

As the curtain rises there is a sound of hammering. MEADOWS *enters with a tray laden with flowers.*

BOLTON. Here Martha, come and hold this crazy thing. It shakes something awful. I am fair scared it will give me a fall.

[MEADOWS *puts down the tray and goes to the butler's aid.*]

MEADOWS. It's you that's shaking, not the ladder.

BOLTON. Get along with you, woman. What for would I shake? Oh, Lord, hold it steady! Can't you?

MEADOWS. I *am* holding it. If you'd stay still there'd be no need for me to hold it.

BOLTON. I can't stay still. The crazy thing ain't even on its legs. Oh, dang the thing! I can't reach that end!

MEADOWS. Why don't you go up higher?

BOLTON. I'd fall.

MEADOWS. Gammon, man. You're scared. Let me get up there. I'd fix it in a twinkle.

BOLTON. No you don't. Hold steady, I'm going up. . . . There! Now where is that nail?

MEADOWS. In your mouth.

BOLTON. Right. How did you know it was in my mouth?

MEADOWS. By the way you talk. You talk too much, you do. Ain't you got that end nailed up yet?

BOLTON [*ceasing his hammering*]. There, 'tis done. Look out, I'm coming down. [*He descends cautiously and stands gazing up at the device, spelling it out.*] "Welcome to the Successful." That's it, and successful he is, too. That looks real well. There'll be another one over the front door.

MEADOWS. Silly nonsense, I call it.

BOLTON [*shocked*]. Young woman, you be careful what you say.

MEADOWS. I don't care. I said silly nonsense, and so it is. Anyone would think he was a wounded hero home from the war. You don't suppose he'll like all this, do you?

[*They come inside and* MEADOWS *begins to arrange the flowers.*]

BOLTON. Yes, I do.

MEADOWS. Well then, he won't. No sensible man would.

BOLTON. That just shows all you know, young woman. I tell you he will like it. He's liked it before and he'll like it now. It's his due.

MEADOWS. Well then, he ain't the man I thought he was, that's all. Such stuff as this! Anyone would think he was a child!

BOLTON. Child or no he's a sensible man, as you know well, and a clever man, too. He expects this sort of thing and so would I in his place.

MEADOWS. What's he done, anyway?

BOLTON. Why, don't you know? I thought everybody knew what he done. He's just got his bill passed in Parliament.

MEADOWS. What was the bill about?

BOLTON. I don't know, but it was his bill and now it's the law of the land. It's his birthday too.

MEADOWS. Birthday, eh? I suppose there'll be a cake with sixty candles on it.

BOLTON. You hold yer tongue young woman. And it wouldn't be sixty neither. He's not more than fifty.

MEADOWS. Well, fifty, then. It'll have to be a mighty big cake to take fifty candles.

BOLTON. I'd recommend you, young woman, to pay less attention to 'im and 'is cake and more to your work.

MEADOWS. I'll attend to my work all right without you having to tell me, Mr. Bolton, thank you.

BOLTON. Don't you be saucy now.

MEADOWS [*with immense disdain*]. Saucy! Hm! That's good, that is.

BOLTON. Yes it is good as you'll find out. And 'ere's another thing. I'm going to 'ave all the servants outside the kitchen door, when Sir Benjamin arrives, with flags in their hands.

MEADOWS. Oh, indeed, Mr. Bolton, that's very nice I'm sure, but I'm afraid you're wrong this time. You won't 'ave all the servants at the kitchen door.

BOLTON. And why not, may I arsk?

MEADOWS. Because I won't be there, leastways not with a flag.

BOLTON. Yes, you will! You'll be there with a flag in your 'and, and a-wavin' of it!

MEADOWS. I'll do no such thing! You'll be telling me next you're going to 'ave a band and a procession.

BOLTON. No we ain't going to 'ave no band nor a procession neither, but we are going to 'ave the servants outside the kitchen door with flags in their 'ands. And you'll be there with the rest, my gal, or I'll want to know the reason why.

[BOLTON *goes out.*]

MEADOWS [*calling after him*]. We'll see about that!

[*She walks about the room with her head held disdainfully high, arranging the flowers as she goes.* LADY PARLOWE *enters. She is a small, gray-haired, and harassed looking woman. At present she is in a state of nervous excitement, clasping and unclasping her hands.*]

LADY PARLOWE. Oh, Meadows! Yes, that's right, plenty of flowers. I think those delphiniums over there on the mantel-piece—and those sweet peas—on this table. There. Did you dust this room thoroughly this morning?

MEADOWS. Yes'm.

LADY PARLOWE. There's a little dust still. Have you a duster? Ah, thank you. [*She dusts the books delicately.*] We must have everything looking as nice as possible. Did you put matches in the box?—And cigarettes? Ah, yes, that's right. Oh, I nearly forgot! Did Bolton nail that message of welcome over the French window?

MEADOWS [*with a sniff*]. Yes'm. It's there now and there's another one over the front door.

LADY PARLOWE [*inspecting the sign; admiringly*]. Yes, that looks very nice. I am sure the master will

be pleased. Good gracious! It's nearly four o'clock! What time is the train due?

MEADOWS. Three-twenty-five, m' lady.

LADY PARLOWE. Oh, yes. He'll be here very soon now. You're sure Maddock went to the station with the car?

MEADOWS. Yes, m'lady.

LADY PARLOWE. All right. That will do now, Meadows. [MEADOWS *goes out.*] Oh, Meadows, Meadows! [MEADOWS *comes in.*] Have you seen to the bedroom?

MEADOWS. Yes, m'lady.

LADY PARLOWE. The sheets have been aired?

MEADOWS. Yes, m'lady.

LADY PARLOWE. Have you put his slippers out?

MEADOWS. Yes, m'lady.

LADY PARLOWE. Have you put hot water in the basin?

MEADOWS. No, m'lady.

LADY PARLOWE. Well, please do so at once. Oh dear, I hope there's nothing else.

[*As* MEADOWS *goes out* FAITH CONCORD *comes in. The latter is somewhat taller than her sister, and there is a trace of hardness in her expression. Common sense is her strong point. She is unmarried.*]

LADY PARLOWE. Oh, there you are, my dear Faith! What have you been doing?

FAITH. What I always do after lunch, lying down. Why do you ask?

LADY PARLOWE. Oh, I don't know. I have been so busy I don't seem to have had a moment to myself all day.

FAITH. My dear Ruth, you're always busy. Considering the small amount you get done, you're quite the busiest person I know.

LADY PARLOWE. Oh, Faith, how can you be so brutal? Why, I've done heaps to-day.

FAITH. Have you? Show me one of the heaps.

LADY PARLOWE [*leading the way to the message of welcome*]. Well, here's one. Don't you think it looks fine?

FAITH. D'you mean to tell me you put that thing there?

LADY PARLOWE. No, no. Bolton put it there.

FAITH. But I thought you said that was one of the things you had done.

LADY PARLOWE. Oh well, I told Bolton to put it up. It's all the same thing.

FAITH. I see. So you have busied yourself the whole day preparing for your husband's return.

LADY PARLOWE. Why yes—yes, of course.

FAITH. And what's the good of it all? What have you achieved when you've spent all this time getting things ready?

LADY PARLOWE. What have I achieved? What an extraordinary question.

FAITH. It's not an extraordinary question. It's a good, matter-of-fact, commonsense question. But I don't suppose you can answer it.

LADY PARLOWE. Of course I can answer it. I like to make everything as pleasant as possible for Benjamin when he comes home.

FAITH. My dear Ruth, you spend your whole life making everything as pleasant as possible for Benjamin. You make things far too pleasant for him.

LADY PARLOWE. Faith, don't be ridiculous.

FAITH. I'm not being ridiculous. There are two things in life that I believe in more firmly than anything else. One is commonsense and the other is plain speaking. Now I'm going to give you a little plain speaking. I'm your elder sister and I can afford to give it. You're ruining Benjamin with all this adulation. He gets his fill of it in his public life, and

now you're going to pile it on in the bosom of his family. You'll make him more conceited than he is already.

LADY PARLOWE. Faith, I wish you wouldn't speak like that.

FAITH. Well, I told you I was going to speak plainly so you may as well let me finish what I have to say. If you take my advice you'll drop all this conquering hero business and receive him in the ordinary domestic way.

LADY PARLOWE. But he wouldn't like it.

FAITH. No, of course he wouldn't like it. He loves all this flag-wagging nonsense. He expects it. It would do him a world of good not to get what he expects for once in a way.

LADY PARLOWE. But I can't alter things now. We're all ready for him. He'll be here in a few minutes. Bolton's only just finished putting up the message of welcome over the French windows here.

FAITH. You've got one over the front door. What on earth have you got another one here for?

LADY PARLOWE. Well you see he so often comes in this way. It's shorter from the drive. I was afraid he might miss the one over the front door.

FAITH. Dear me, what a catastrophe that would be! Yes, he would come by the shortest way from the drive. He's that sort of a man. Well my advice is to pull them all down.

LADY PARLOWE. Faith, I can't now.

FAITH. Well then, it's too late and it can't be helped, but I'm perfectly certain you'll regret it in time. I believe in a prophet being entirely without honour in his own country.

LADY PARLOWE. You talk as though Benjamin were a child.

FAITH. So he is. All men are children and he's the biggest of them all. Just a big, conceited, spoiled child.

LADY PARLOWE [*producing a handkerchief*]. Faith, I wish you wouldn't talk like that.

FAITH. Now Ruth, *please* don't begin to cry. It's too silly. Every time I try to talk a little common sense to you, you begin to cry. It's all perfectly true what I say. And you know it's perfectly true. You're spoiling Benjamin by flattery and adulation just as you'd spoil a child.

[ERNEST *comes in from the garden. He is good-looking, but has a self-depreciatory air and a slightly gauche manner.* LADY PARLOWE *discovers him first and motions frantically to* FAITH *to stop her denunciation of* SIR BENJAMIN, *as this is one of the things* ERNEST *must never hear.*]

LADY PARLOWE. There you are, Ernest! Wherever have you been? I've been looking for you ever since lunch time.

ERNEST. I was in the garden, mother.

LADY PARLOWE. Where? I couldn't find you.

ERNEST. I was in the orchard, reading.

FAITH. My dear Ernest, how inaccurate you are! Just now you said you were in the garden, and now you confess you were reading in the orchard. You really must try and be a little more exact in what you say.

ERNEST. I am sorry, Aunt Faith. I was in the orchard, though. The garden and the orchard always seem much the same place to me.

FAITH. My dear boy, there is a high hedge between them.

ERNEST. I know, but — — oh well, never mind. Do you ever sit in the orchard, Aunt Faith? It's beautiful there. There is no sound but the apples tumbling to the ground, and the wasps boring away in the fallen fruit.

FAITH. What a peculiar idea you have of beauty. Wasps indeed! No, I have never sat in the orchard.

LADY PARLOWE. Ernest, please don't sit in that chair. I have just arranged the cushions and you always crumple them up so. Come and sit over here. [*She indicates a cushionless chair with a straight back.* ERNEST *crosses to it and sits down.* LADY PARLOWE *glances at the clock.*] Dear me, that train must be very late. I wonder if Maddock has broken down with the car.

FAITH. Calm yourself, my dear Ruth. He will be here directly.

LADY PARLOWE. Yes, but he ought to be here now. Ernest, are you ready to receive your father?

ERNEST. Ready, mother?

LADY PARLOWE. Yes. Have you made yourself tidy? I don't believe you have at all. Get up and let me see. [ERNEST *rises.*] Why, my dear boy, you're covered with grass. What have you been doing? [*Picking leaves of grass off his back*] Oh, you'll have to go and brush yourself.

FAITH. Oh, leave the boy alone. He can welcome his father just as well covered with grass as not.

LADY PARLOWE. There, that's better. I think you'd better go and brush your hair.

[ERNEST *sits down.*]

FAITH. Ruth, have you persuaded Benjamin to advertise for a secretary yet?

LADY PARLOWE. Yes, he did advertise, just before he left this last time. But he's so hard to please.

FAITH. Well in my opinion he ought to have a secretary. It's only common sense. A man of affairs like Benjamin can't possibly expect to do all his own work.

LADY PARLOWE. He always has done everything for himself.

FAITH. I know he has. All the more reason why he

should start and let someone do the hard work for him. A competent secretary could do it just as well.

LADY PARLOWE. Oh I don't think so, Faith. He's very particular in his methods.

FAITH. That's simply because he's always taken everything on his own shoulders. He'd get more work done and have it done better if he had someone to help him. Ernest, why don't you try and help your father?

ERNEST [*horrified*]. I, Aunt Faith?

FAITH. Yes, you. You seem to have precious little to do with yourself—lying in the orchard.

LADY PARLOWE. Faith, you know perfectly well the poor boy's reading law.

FAITH. Reading law, is he? I haven't seen him at it very much. Ernest were you reading law in the orchard?

ERNEST. Oh, Aunt Faith—law, in the orchard?

FAITH. Well, I don't see why not. What *were* you reading in the orchard?

ERNEST. Shelley.

FAITH. Poetry, eh? I haven't much use for poetry myself, but I suppose it may be all right for you. But seriously, Ruth, you ought to do something about a secretary for Benjamin. If you don't speak to him I will.

LADY PARLOWE. I daresay you're right. I'll speak to him about it . . . . Listen, did you hear the car? Ernest, go and see if it's coming up the drive.

ERNEST [*rising and going to the window*]. I don't see it mother. It must have been some car on the road.

LADY PARLOWE. Oh I do wish he'd come . . . . Good gracious! Did Bolton run the flag up?

FAITH. How on earth should I know?

LADY PARLOWE. Ernest, did Bolton run the flag up?

ERNEST. Yes, mother, I think so. Anyway, it's at the top of the flagstaff now.

[*There is silence for a few moments.*]

LADY PARLOWE [*jumping up*]. There. It *is* the car, I can hear it coming up the drive. Ernest, please go and brush your hair. [*Ernest goes out.*] Faith, come with me. [*Calling after* ERNEST *as he goes*] Ernest, go and tell Bolton to go to the front door.

[*They go out through the French windows. After a short pause voices are heard outside. There is a faint, wavering cheer.* MEADOWS *comes in carrying a small paper Union Jack. She glances swiftly about the room, and sticks the flag in the back of an armchair. She goes out.* SIR BENJAMIN PARLOWE *comes in. He is of medium height, rather inclined to be stout. He wears a dust coat, cap and gloves and carries an attache case. He is followed by his wife who takes the coat, cap and attache case and places them on a chair.*]

SIR BENJAMIN [*with bluff, self-satisfied humour*]. Well, well, here we are again, eh? Home once more, what? Ruth, my dear, I am just longing for a cup of tea.

LADY PARLOWE. Yes, Benjamin. I'll ring. It'll be ready in a minute. [*She rings.*]

SIR BENJAMIN. Good! Splendid! Nothing like a cup of tea! That confounded train! What time is it? Quarter past four? Nearly twenty minutes late. The train service gets worse every day. [*He sees the flag in the back of the chair.*] Hello, hello, what's this? H'm, h'm, part of the scheme of welcome, Ruth? Tut, tut. Flags, eh? Little paper flags—take it away, take it away.

[BOLTON *comes in.*]

LADY PARLOWE. Oh, Bolton, will you let us have some tea now—in here, please.

SIR BENJAMIN [*indicating the flag*]. Did you put that thing there?

BOLTON. No, sir.

SIR BENJAMIN. Do you know who put it there?

BOLTON [*confused*]. No, sir, that is — — I . . . .

SIR BENJAMIN. Confound it, man, can't you answer a plain question? Do you know who put it there?

BOLTON. No, sir.

SIR BENJAMIN. Then why the devil didn't you say so at first. Take the confounded thing away.

BOLTON. Yes, sir. [*He goes out with the flag.*]

SIR BENJAMIN [*in good humour once more*]. Well, Ruth, my dear, how's everything been going since I went away. There is a new maid, isn't there?

LADY PARLOWE. Yes, Meadows.

SIR BENJAMIN. Is she all right?

LADY PARLOWE. Yes, I think so. Bolton says she's cheeky.

[BOLTON *comes in with tea and retires.*]

SIR BENJAMIN [*helping himself to sandwiches*]. That man's a fool. What's in these sandwiches?

LADY PARLOWE. Anchovy, dear. Do you like it?

SIR BENJAMIN [*with his mouth full*]. H'm. Not bad. [*He takes two more.*] How are the chickens?

LADY PARLOWE. All right. I think the White Wyandottes are good layers.

SIR BENJAMIN. So they should be. Any foxes lately?

LADY PARLOWE. No — — yes. There was one last week.

SIR BENJAMIN. Damn. How many did it take?

LADY PARLOWE. Two, I think. Don't worry about it, dear. They weren't Wyandottes. Have some of this cake and some more tea.

SIR BENJAMIN [*passing his cup*]. What kind of cake is it? Cream cake? Can't bear cream cake. Surely you know that, Ruth. You know better than to offer me cream cake. Here, I'll have some of this.

[*He helps himself from another plate.* FAITH *comes in.*] Well, Faith. How have you been keeping? [*He does not rise.*]

FAITH. Much the same as usual, thank you, Benjamin. No, nothing to eat, Ruth. Just a cup of tea, please.

SIR BENJAMIN. You know, Faith, you don't eat enough. You ought to have a good meal now. Look at me. If you were to eat more you'd get fatter.

FAITH. Thank you, Benjamin, I haven't the least desire to be any fatter.

SIR BENJAMIN. No, but you ought to have. Everybody ought to want to be fatter.

FAITH. Indeed, do you want to be any fatter, Benjamin?

SIR BENJAMIN. I? No.

FAITH. Well, why not?

SIR BENJAMIN. Eh? Oh, I — why I'm . . . I'm . . .

FAITH. You're fat enough already, d'you mean?

SIR BENJAMIN. Eh? Why — er — yes — I suppose . . . .

FAITH. Then, you're the exception. Is that it?

SIR BENJAMIN. Certainly. I'm fat enough now because when I was thinner I wanted to be fatter.

FAITH. You always get what you want, don't you, Benjamin?

SIR BENJAMIN. Usually, my dear Faith, usually.

LADY PARLOWE. Benjamin, won't you have something more to eat?

SIR BENJAMIN. No, no more. If there's one thing more important than eating enough it's knowing when to stop.

LADY PARLOWE. Faith, isn't it splendid about the bill?

FAITH. Oh yes, Benjamin, I haven't congratulated you yet. But it's an act now, isn't it?

SIR BENJAMIN. Certainly it's an act. It's the law of the land.

FAITH. Oh yes. How splendid. [*Taking up her knitting*] Let me see, something about mad dogs, wasn't it?

SIR BENJAMIN. Mad dogs? No. Certainly not. It was about rights of way.

FAITH. Oh yes. How foolish of me! And you've closed the right of way across your own property as an example of the power of the law.

SIR BENJAMIN. Certainly I have. Isn't it within my rights to do so?

FAITH. Oh yes, I suppose so. But it seems a pity after it's been open so many years

SIR BENJAMIN. I don't care if it's been open since the flood. It's my property and I can do what I like with it.

FAITH. Yes, but it certainly makes it more unpleasant. The villagers have looked upon it as a public road for generations. There's been a lot of grumbling about it.

SIR BENJAMIN. Of course there has. Confound 'em. Let 'em grumble. I'll talk to them.

FAITH. Yes, Benjamin, I don't doubt it. But talking isn't always of much use, you know.

LADY PARLOWE [*endeavouring to lead the conversation back to safer topics*]. Benjamin, Faith thinks you ought to have a secretary to help you with your work.

SIR BENJAMIN. Well I've advertised for one, but I doubt if that will be much use. I'll never get one to suit me. D'you know I'd amaze you if I were to describe the kind of young man that has the impertinence nowadays to think he's good enough to work under a public man. Insufferable young puppies, thinking they know everything, with no more brains than that teapot.

FAITH. Oh, I think some of them have brains, Benjamin. I'm sure you'd find it a great help if you had some one.

SIR BENJAMIN. My dear Faith, I don't doubt it, but

I'd like you to tell me where I'd find one with any intelligence at all.

LADY PARLOWE. You know, Benjamin, I always said you worked too hard, but you never would listen to me.

SIR BENJAMIN. Well, I've always believed in doing a thing myself.

LADY PARLOWE. Yes, but when a man has as many things to do as you have it's advisable for him to get someone to take some of the burden off his shoulders.

SIR BENJAMIN [*rather pleased by this*]. Well, I daresay you're right. I'm quite prepared to engage a secretary if you'll find me one who has the brains of a woodlouse.

FAITH. That oughtn't to be so very difficult. Have you had any replies to your advertisement?

SIR BENJAMIN. Oh, one or two letters that I tore up as soon as I read them.

FAITH. Why?

SIR BENJAMIN. Because I knew at once from the way they were worded what sort of a chap the applicant was.

LADY PARLOWE. My dear Benjamin, I don't see how you possibly could . . . .

SIR BENJAMIN. Oh, I know my dear Ruth. Trust me for knowing. I know the cock-sure, modern young man pretty well by now and I can interpret him through his letters. Upon my soul I don't know what the younger generation is coming to nowadays. These young men you see, just down from the University, swaggering about in slipshod clothes, no manners, no brains, no nothing.

FAITH. If you're so disgusted with the modern young man, why not try the modern young woman.

SIR BENJAMIN. What? As a secretary? Some giggling flapper sitting at my desk, rummaging among my papers? My dear Faith, you must be off your head.

LADY PARLOWE. Oh, Benjamin, you really ought to do something.

FAITH. You're very hard to suit, Benjamin. All the same I don't mind prophesying that the younger generation will give you a surprise one of these days.

SIR BENJAMIN. They can't possibly surprise me more than they have already.

LADY PARLOWE. But what are you going to do?

SIR BENJAMIN. Do my own work, of course. As I *have* done for the last twenty years.

[ERNEST *comes in.*]

SIR BENJAMIN. Well, Ernest, my boy, what have you been doing with yourself? How's the law getting on? Been reading a lot lately I hope.

ERNEST. Yes, father.

SIR BENJAMIN. That's right. That's right. And I'm sure you're getting to like it. Interesting, don't you find it?

ERNEST. Er—yes, father.

SIR BENJAMIN. Of course. I used to get through two volumes a week when I was your age. Just ate the stuff up. What's that you've got there?

ERNEST. Shelley, father.

SIR BENJAMIN. Shelley? Shelley who?

ERNEST. The poet, father.

SIR BENJAMIN. Poet? D'you mean to tell me you've been reading poetry?

ERNEST [*in agony*]. Yes, father.

SIR BENJAMIN. Upon my soul I don't see why you want to waste your time reading that stuff. I never read poetry at your age. Never wanted to. I haven't missed it I assure you.

FAITH. Let the boy read poetry, Benjamin, if he wants to. It can't possibly do him any harm.

SIR BENJAMIN. Yes it can do him harm. It'll fill his head with a lot of unpractical nonsense.

ERNEST [*his face white with anger and rather sur-*

prised at this new emotion]. Please, father, give me that book.

SIR BENJAMIN. Eh? What? Why, of course, here you are. Only please understand this. I don't want you reading that stuff when you ought to be reading law.

ERNEST. No, father.

SIR BENJAMIN [*rising and standing on the hearthrug with his back to the fireplace*]. You know it really puzzles me what people can see in poetry. And why should young people want to read the stuff. No one ever did in my time.

FAITH. You can't expect each generation to be like the last, Benjamin. It isn't common sense.

SIR BENJAMIN. Well, I don't expect that, but I do think the present generation is exceeding all limits. Why, I'll give you a concrete example of what I mean.

LADY PARLOWE. Ernest, I don't believe you ever brushed your hair.

SIR BENJAMIN [*frowning*]. Ruth.

LADY PARLOWE. I'm sorry, Benjamin. What was it you were saying?

SIR BENJAMIN. I was saying that I could give you a concrete example of what the present generation is like. To-day on the train, there was a young woman, not a day older than Ernest there. She was sitting opposite me. Started talking to me as cool as you please. For all she knew I might have been the most desperate character.

LADY PARLOWE. Oh, Benjamin!

SIR BENJAMIN. Ruth — please —

LADY PARLOWE. I'm sorry.

SIR BENJAMIN. Well, as I was saying. This young person — she had bobbed hair — confound it — you see it everywhere now — and round, tortoise-shell-rimmed glasses and she was reading — what on earth d'you think? — why *The Independent*, you know, red hot Socialist rag. Well, she started talking to me.

We had quite a long talk. I was just drawing her out, you understand. Well, the things that young woman knew and could talk about. Politics, literature, art and so on, why, anyone would have thought that she knew more than I did. Really it was most unseemly. I can't think what girls are coming to nowadays. There she was—this young minx who ought to be baking cakes in the kitchen—holding forth and laying down the law. She got out at Frampton or I'd have put her in her place—told her what I thought of her.

FAITH. And what do you think is her place, Benjamin?

SIR BENJAMIN. Her place? Why she ought to be at home. What was she doing travelling about alone like that I'd like to know. She ought to be learning how to cook, or sew, or knit, or something. As I've always said a woman's place is in the home. Don't you think so Ruth?

LADY PARLOWE. Yes dear, of course.

SIR BENJAMIN. Certainly. That's what I say. In the home.

FAITH. Benjamin, I'm afraid you're dreadfully behind the times.

SIR BENJAMIN. Nonsense, Faith, nonsense. Women are trying their best to get outside the home now—getting into parliament and all the rest of it. But they'll go back to the home. You mark my words. . . . Well, I must go and write some letters.

FAITH. I should rather like to meet this young person of yours, Benjamin.

SIR BENJAMIN. Well, you're welcome to her. You're welcome. [*He goes out.*]

LADY PARLOWE [*after a pause, rising*]. Oh, dear, I must go to talk to cook. I'm afraid she'll put onions in the soup, and Benjamin hates them so.

FAITH. Do you know, Ruth, I firmly believe that girl Benjamin was describing would make an excellent secretary.

LADY PARLOWE. Oh, Faith, he'd never have her in the house. What? A girl like that, who reads *The Independent?* It would never do, never, never!

[LADY PARLOWE *goes to the kitchen.* FAITH *goes into the garden, leaving* ERNEST *alone with his Shelley. (This is just what he has been hoping for.) He moves over to a more comfortable chair and pulls up another for his feet. He reads. After a short pause* NETTA MONTGOMERY *comes in rather stealthily from the garden. She is quite a pretty girl with dark hair cut short, and lovely eyes. She is very neatly dressed, and carries an attache case rather like* SIR BENJAMIN'S. *She and* ERNEST *catch sight of each other simultaneously.* ERNEST *starts from his seat.*]

NETTA. Hello!

ERNEST [*confused*]. Oh — er — hello!

NETTA. Did I startle you?

ERNEST. No. I was reading.

NETTA. What were you reading?

ERNEST. Shelley.

NETTA. How extraordinary! I never expected to find anyone in Sir Benjamin's household reading Shelley. I expect you're wondering who I am.

ERNEST. Well — er —

NETTA. Of course you are. I don't blame you. Well, I'll tell you. I'm his new secretary.

ERNEST. I didn't know he'd engaged one.

NETTA. Well, just between you and me and that sofa over there, neither does he.

ERNEST. Oh. Doesn't he expect you, then?

NETTA. Of course not! That's the whole joke. I'm the answer to his advertisement.

ERNEST. I see. Did you come on the same train with him?

NETTA. Yes. Why?

ERNEST. He's just been describing you.

NETTA. Describing *me*? Oh I *do* wish I could have heard. How *perfectly* thrilling. *Do* tell me what he said.

ERNEST. Oh I don't think I'd better.

NETTA. Heavens! Was it as bad as that? My prospects are black. What did he call me?

ERNEST. I think he said you were a minx.

NETTA. Oh, the old beast!—Oh, I beg your pardon. Is he any relation of yours?

ERNEST. He's my father.

NETTA. Oh, I'm so sorry. But minx is such a hateful word, don't you think?

ERNEST. He said you ought to be learning to knit.

NETTA. Of course, he would. Oh dear — there I go again.

ERNEST. Oh, it doesn't matter really.

NETTA [*after a pause*]. You know you're not very hospitable.

ERNEST. Hospitable?

NETTA. No. As the son of the house you ought at least to ask me to come in and make myself at home. After all I *am* the new secretary.

ERNEST. I'm awfully sorry. Do come and sit down. We've just had tea. Would you like some? I can soon get some fresh made.

NETTA. I'm simply dying for a cup of tea.

[ERNEST *rings.*]

ERNEST. Did you have a bad journey?

NETTA. Oh, no. I was awfully entertained talking to Sir Benjamin. It was thrilling. You see I knew exactly who he was, while he didn't know me from Adam — Eve I mean.

[*Enter* BOLTON.]

ERNEST. Some fresh tea please, Bolton.

[*Exit* BOLTON *with the tray.*]

NETTA. By the way, I'd better introduce myself. My name is Netta Montgomery.

ERNEST. And mine is Ernest—you know the rest.

NETTA. Now the formalities have been appeased. D'you think we ought to shake hands?

ERNEST. Oh, I don't think so. So you were doing your best to find out all you could about father?

NETTA. Wise man, you are right. You kuow most people think that a person who is going to employ somebody ought to find out all they can about the person they're going to employ, whereas I think it's far more important for the person who is going to be employed to find out all about the person who is going to employ them.

[*Enter* BOLTON *with tea.*]

ERNEST. Er—quite so. Thanks Bolton, we'll have it here. How do you take your tea?

[*Exit* BOLTON.]

NETTA. No sugar, please. I think sugar is so bad for the complexion, don't you?

ERNEST. Yes, I suppose it is, though I never really thought about it in that way.

NETTA. No, I suppose not. May I have a sandwich?

ERNEST [*handing her the plate*]. Oh, please do. I'm so sorry.

NETTA. Thanks. May I have two. They're so small. Oh, I love anchovy.

ERNEST. How did you get up from the station?

NETTA. I walked. My luggage will be up here soon.

ERNEST. Oh, your luggage.

NETTA. Yes. Did you suppose secretaries had no luggage.

ERNEST. No, I thought you'd only come to see father.

NETTA. Oh, dear no. I'm here for keeps. He's got to have me now.

ERNEST. I hope you'll have no difficulty.

NETTA. Why? What do you mean?

ERNEST. Well, you know father's very particular. And I know he didn't like the idea of having a girl as a secretary.

NETTA. Didn't he? Oh dear. Never mind. We'll manage it somehow. I'm not going back. You'll help me, won't you?

ERNEST. Yes, if you think it'll be any use.

NETTA. Of course it will. By the way, what's Lady Parlowe like? Oh, I'm so sorry, I keep forgetting. Of course she's your mother.

ERNEST. Yes. You can't hope much from her. She agrees to everything father says. Aunt Faith will back you up, though.

NETTA. Who's she?

ERNEST. My mother's sister. After father had described you, Aunt Faith said she'd like to meet you.

NETTA. Did she? Good for her. Does she live here?

ERNEST. Yes. You'll see her before long.

NETTA. Could we arrange things so that I see her before anyone else?

ERNEST [*rising*]. I'll go and fetch her if you like.

NETTA. Oh no, don't go. I don't want you to leave me. I need your support.

ERNEST [*highly gratified*]. All right. But what are you going to say to father?

NETTA. Why, simply tell him I've come as his secretary. I don't see what else there is to say.

ERNEST. He may refuse to keep you.

NETTA. He probably will—at first. We've got to persuade him. I suppose he's amenable to persuasion, isn't he?

ERNEST. No, I don't think he is very. I've never had much success in that way. You know it's a great pity you were reading *The Independent*. That paper to father is like a red rag to a bull.

NETTA. Oh, you are discouraging. Look here I may as well tell you all about it, if you'll promise not to repeat what I say. Promise.

ERNEST. I promise.

NETTA. You see it's not for myself alone that I care —at least not primarily. My family are dependent on me. My mother's not very strong and my sister is a permanent invalid.

ERNEST. Have you no brothers?

NETTA. Yes—one. We won't talk about him if you don't mind.

ERNEST. Perhaps if you were to tell father about your family it might help.

NETTA. My dear man, I've got a little more pride than that. D'you think I want to subsist on Sir Benjamin Parlowe's charity?

ERNEST [*abashed*]. I'm sorry. No, of course not.

NETTA. No, that would never do. Everything must be done on my own merits. However, I have a good deal of confidence in myself—rightly or wrongly—I feel sure everything will be all right once he accepts me. [*Laughing suddenly*] That sounds matrimonial, doesn't it? . . . We've got to work it somehow. I promised mother I wouldn't come home without a permanent job of some kind.

ERNEST. There's somebody coming. I think it's father.

NETTA. Heavens! Please don't go away.

[SIR BENJAMIN *enters. They both rise.* NETTA *catches hold of* ERNEST'S *hand. They stand facing* SIR BENJAMIN. *As he approaches* NETTA *drops* ERNEST'S *hand quickly. She is quite composed.*]

SIR BENJAMIN [*with his eyes everywhere but on* NETTA *and* ERNEST]. Ernest, have you seen my little black book of addresses? I have dropped the confounded thing somewhere.

NETTA [*in a whisper, nudging* ERNEST]. Introduce me.

ERNEST [*stammering*]. Er—er—father, this is—er— Miss Montgomery.

SIR BENJAMIN. Oh,—er—I beg your pardon, I didn't see you. How do you do? [*His expression hardens as he begins to recognize her.*] Why, I think we've met before. Weren't you——?

NETTA. Yes, I was.

SIR BENJAMIN. Do you want to see me about something?

NETTA. Yes. You advertised for a secretary recently.

SIR BENJAMIN. I did, but I've decided now that I don't want one.

NETTA. Have you ever had a secretary?

SIR BENJAMIN. No.

NETTA. Well, I'm sure you'll find things easier with one. I'm a trained stenographer and typist, and I know all about bookkeeping.

SIR BENJAMIN. Do you mean that you——?

NETTA. Yes, I'm the answer to your advertisement.

SIR BENJAMIN. But I don't want a secretary. I'd much rather be without one.

NETTA. You can't know what it's like to have one if you've never tried it.

SIR BENJAMIN. Bless my soul. But, I don't quite follow you. You never wrote to answer the advertisement. At least, I never received any answer.

NETTA. No, I sent no letter. I answered the advertisement in person. You see I'm a firm believer in the personal element.

[BOLTON *comes in from the garden, carrying two suitcases and a rug.*]

SIR BENJAMIN [*to* BOLTON]. What the devil have you got there?

BOLTON. Miss Montgomery's luggage, sir.

[SIR BENJAMIN *subsides into a chair.*]

[CURTAIN]

ACT II

The scene is SIR BENJAMIN'S *study upstairs. There is little comfort here—rather austerity and disorderliness. The most conspicuous thing in the room is an enormous writing-desk littered with papers, books of reference, pens, paper-weights, and so on. There is a meagre fireplace, and, on either side of it, shelves of books, on legal and constitutional matters. On the walls are framed diplomas and college groups. There is a massive green safe in one corner.*

It is nine o'clock the following morning. SIR BENJAMIN *is seated at his desk with* NETTA *on his left.*

NETTA [*opening and reading a letter*]. Will you speak to the Frampleton Young Men's Brotherhood on the eleventh?

SIR BENJAMIN [*reading the morning paper; and very ill at ease*]. Not if I can help it.

NETTA. The point is, can you speak to them?

SIR BENJAMIN. How do you mean, can I? Of course I can. Do you seriously suppose . . .

NETTA. Oh, I don't mean that. I know that you're capable of speaking to them. What I mean is, have you another engagement?

SIR BENJAMIN [*rustling the paper irritably*]. How should I know?

NETTA. Well, I should have thought you'd have known. Can't you remember? This is the second.

SIR BENJAMIN. I am addressing the Conservative Club at Hartingford on the seventh. That's about far enough ahead.

NETTA. Don't you keep a book of engagements?

SIR BENJAMIN [*rustling the paper*]. No, certainly not. My memory is good anough for me.

NETTA. But you said just now — —. Oh, well, never mind. But seriously, you know, you ought to keep a book of engagements. It's a necessity for a busy man like you.

SIR BENJAMIN. Well, I don't! And I've never found it necessary!

NETTA [*picking up a small leather book*]. Here's a little pocket diary, the very thing! [*Writing*] Let me see, Conservative Club—Hartingford, on the seventh. Now what else is there? Do try and remember. Have you anything to-morrow?

SIR BENJAMIN. No.

NETTA. The next day?

SIR BENJAMIN. No.

NETTA. The day after? No, that's Sunday. What about Monday? Anything on Monday?

SIR BENJAMIN. No.

NETTA. Tuesday?

SIR BENJAMIN. Nothing. Oh yes. I'm going out to dinner with the Ross-Joneses.

NETTA. Good. "Ross-Joneses. Dinner. Tuesday." Now we *are* getting on. Oh Lord, here's a clash already. The Ross-Joneses and the Conservative Club come on the same night.

SIR BENJAMIN. Nonsense.

NETTA. It isn't nonsense. You said Tuesday, didn't you? Well Tuesday's the 7th.

SIR BENJAMIN. It's absurd. I can't have done a thing like that. It must have been Monday the Ross-Joneses asked us.

NETTA. Or Wednesday?

SIR BENJAMIN. No I'm sure it wasn't Wednesday.

NETTA. Perhaps you were to address the Conservative Club some other night. You must try and think. Are you sure it was the 7th?

SIR BENJAMIN. Absolutely certain. At least—

NETTA. You see you don't really know. Of course if you had kept an engagement book.

SIR BENJAMIN. My dear young lady, for the last thirty-five years I've kept all my engagements without writing them down and I don't see why I should begin now.

NETTA [*intensely; leaning forward*]. Have you ever considered that that very same answer has been given by mankind all down the ages whenever he was confronted with something new?

SIR BENJAMIN. I really don't see what bearing that has on the point in question.

NETTA. It has a very direct bearing. Can't you picture the last of the cave-man conservatives sitting down to dinner with a friend and being confronted with the first knife and fork. He would say "My dear sir, these two hands have been good enough for me for the last thirty-five years, and for my father before me, and I don't see why I should start using those dangerous tools now." That's what he'd say and in saying so he'd show himself an enemy to progress.

SIR BENJAMIN. Progress be damned!

NETTA. I'm sorry you said that. You don't mean it. You know you don't.

SIR BENJAMIN. Certainly I mean it. There's far too much progress in the world to-day.

NETTA [*sighing*]. Well anyhow there's your engagement book. We shall have to straighten out that tangle somehow.

[NETTA *opens another letter, reads it, tears it up into small pieces and drops them in the waste-paper basket.*]

SIR BENJAMIN [*looking up sharply*]. What's that you're tearing up?

NETTA. A letter from a man who wants to sell you a typewriter.

SIR BENJAMIN. And you tear it up.

NETTA. Well you don't want a typewriter.

SIR BENJAMIN. How d'you know I don't? How d'you know a typewriter isn't the very thing I'm most in need of?

NETTA. Because you have a perfectly good one there on the desk.

SIR BENJAMIN. But I may need another. For all you know that typewriter may be out of use.

NETTA. But I know that it's a perfectly good one.

SIR BENJAMIN. How d'you know? You haven't used it.

NETTA. I can see that there's nothing wrong with it.

SIR BENJAMIN. Well anyhow you've no right to tear up my correspondence without consulting me first.

NETTA. Oh come now. You know you must allow me a certain latitude in dealing with your letters. That's one of the things I'm here for, to save you the trouble of wading through a lot of unnecessary correspondence. When you engaged me as your secretary—

SIR BENJAMIN [*fiercely*]. But I never engaged you. I never had any say in the matter at all.

NETTA. Well, I'm here.

SIR BENJAMIN. Yes, you're here because you came. I never engaged you.

NETTA. Do you mean to tell me you never engaged me as your secretary?

SIR BENJAMIN. Certainly. That's exactly what I'm telling you.

NETTA. Then why do you allow me in this room? Why do you let me sit at your desk and open your letters? [SIR BENJAMIN *can find no answer to this. He merely glares ferociously at her and, with a deep grunt of puzzled disgust, resumes his newspaper.* NETTA *continues opening letters.*] Here's an advertisement for some new and powerful rat poison. Do you want any rat poison? [SIR BENJAMIN *does not answer.*]

Are there any rats in the house? You know I don't want to destroy anything without consulting you.

SIR BENJAMIN [*savagely*]. Tear it up. Tear it up.

[BOLTON *comes in.*]

BOLTON. There's three men want to see you.

SIR BENJAMIN. Men? What men?

BOLTON. They're from the village, sir.

SIR BENJAMIN. Who are they?

BOLTON. There's old Matthew Mumberson, sir, and Luke Whitley, and some new man, sir. I don't know his name.

SIR BENJAMIN. What do they want?

BOLTON. Well, sir, I don't know for certain-like, but I think it's about the right of way.

SIR BENJAMIN. Damn them. What do they want to come here fussing about that for? It's all settled and done with. Tell them I'm not at home.

BOLTON. Yes, sir, I did, sir.

SIR BENJAMIN. You did? Well, have they gone?

BOLTON. No, sir.

SIR BENJAMIN. Well, damn it, tell them to go.

BOLTON. I told them you wouldn't want to see them, sir, and that they'd better go, but they told me to ask if you'd see them. They wanted very particular to see you, sir.

SIR BENJAMIN. Confound them. Am I to be invaded in my own house by a gang of ignorant yokels? I don't know what things are coming to nowadays. Tell them if they're not out of this house in ten minutes I'll telephone the police.

BOLTON [*hesitating*]. But, sir, I ——

SIR BENJAMIN. Don't stand there stammering, man. Get out and give 'em that message.

BOLTON. Yes sir.

[*He goes out.*]

NETTA [*who has listened attentively to all this*]. Do

you think you are treating these people fairly in not listening to their grievance?

SIR BENJAMIN. My dear girl, I've listened to their "grievance", as they call it, till I'm sick to death of it. Besides, it's no grievance at all, really. It's all perfectly fair and above board.

NETTA. It appears so to you, but they appear to look at it in a different light. Have you considered whether it's fair and above board to them?

SIR BENJAMIN. Of course I have. D'you think I only consider my own interests. There are no two ways about it. I'm absolutely within my rights.

NETTA. I understand that you have fenced off a part of your grounds which has been used as a right of way by the villagers for generations.

SIR BENJAMIN. There was never any settlement about it. I know that from consulting documents of my grandfather's time. They simply started walking across this land and have continued to do so until I closed it two weeks ago.

NETTA. Then, surely it's theirs by right of usage.

SIR BENJAMIN. There's no such thing as right of usage. It's my land and I can do what I like with it.

NETTA. No one's prepared to deny that. Of course you can do what you like with it. The point is that you ought to give ear to their side of the question. Even if you are within your rights it wouldn't be a great inconvenience to you to let things go on as they have been for so long and give them what they want.

SIR BENJAMIN. As it happens it would be a great inconvenience. I want to extend my fowl run and the only available land is their so-called right of way.

NETTA. I see. So for the sake of a few more chickens, when you have hundreds already, you're going to force the whole village to go three miles round by the road on their way to market at Bletherbury.

SIR BENJAMIN [*rather staggered at this*]. Er — —, well — — yes. If you like to put it that way, that's

exactly how it is. In my opinion it's a perfectly sound reason. [*His tone rising*] And now look here, young lady, I don't want to hear any more about this business from you or anyone else. It's all done with, do you understand?

NETTA. Oh, very well. All the same I think it's highly probable that you will hear more about it, and before very long.

SIR BENJAMIN [*rising, and pacing the room*]. A parcel of infernal yokels thinking they can dictate to me! I'll show them! I'll show them!

[SIR BENJAMIN *sits down fuming, and begins to write.*]

NETTA. Won't you let me write that letter for you on the typewriter. It would save a lot of time. [*He does not answer.*] I am ready. [*She pulls the typewriter in front of her.*]

SIR BENJAMIN [*staring at her and half against his will*]. Messrs. Morley & Morley. Sirs, I am in receipt of your favour of the first instant with regard to . . .

NETTA. All right, I've got that already.

SIR BENJAMIN. How do you mean you've got it?

NETTA. Well, you see, nine business letters out of ten begin that way, so yesterday, when I'd nothing else to do, I typed out several sheets beginning with those words.

SIR BENJAMIN [*amazed*]. Oh — er — quite so. [*Continuing*] With regard to my order of chicken-wire, I now find that I shall need more than the quantity originally specified. Will you, therefore, send me thirty yards more. Yours very truly.

[NETTA *finishes the letter and puts it carefully to one side.* SIR BENJAMIN *rises.*]

NETTA. Are you going out?

SIR BENJAMIN. Yes, I have to see a man over at Frampleton. I shan't be home till this afternoon.

[*With laboured sarcasm*] May I venture to ask what you are going to do?

NETTA. Oh, there's plenty for me to do. I haven't finished tidying up yet. There are piles and piles of letters in that cabinet for me to sort out and put on file.

SIR BENJAMIN. Well don't tear anything up.

[SIR BENJAMIN *goes out.* NETTA *picks up the letter she has just typed and reads it.*]

NETTA [*contemptuously*]. Hm! Chicken-wire! [*She tears up the letter and throws it in the waste-paper basket. Then, she crosses to the cabinet and takes out a large number of letters which she proceeds to sort, placing them in three piles. She stops in the middle of this work, evidently to turn something over in her mind. She arrives at her decision, scribbles off a note, folds it up, and rings for* BOLTON. *After a moment, he enters.*] Bolton, has the deputation left?

BOLTON. The what, miss?

NETTA. The deputation. Those men from the village.

BOLTON. Oh, yes, miss.

NETTA. Well, never mind. Can you tell me the name of the head of the deputation?

BOLTON. No, miss.

NETTA. Who was the eldest of the three?

BOLTON. That would be Matthew Mumberson, miss.

NETTA [*taking up her pen*]. Mumberson? How do you spell it?

BOLTON. I don't know, miss.

NETTA. That's a pity. Well, I'll have to make a shot at it. M-u-m-b-e-r-s-o-n. There! That looks as if it might be right. Will you take this note to Mr. Mumberson at once, or give it to someone else to take.

BOLTON. Very good, miss. Will the gardener's boy do, miss?

NETTA. I don't care who takes it so long as it gets to Mr. Mumberson as soon as possible.

BOLTON. Sir Benjamin's just going out in the car, miss, shall I give it to him?

NETTA. No, for heaven's sake — — [*Laughing suddenly*] Yes, do, only try and give him the impression that Lady Parlowe gave it to you. Do you understand?

BOLTON. Very good, miss.

[*He goes out.* NETTA *resumes her letters.* ERNEST *comes in.*]

ERNEST. Are you very busy?

NETTA. Yes, awfully. Why?

ERNEST [*preparing to leave*]. Oh, nothing. I don't want to interrupt you.

NETTA. Was there anything you wanted?

ERNEST [*embarrassed*]. No — er — I — er — only wanted to come in here. I say, do you mind if I sit here? I won't interrupt. Perhaps I could help you.

NETTA. That's a good idea. You probably could.

ERNEST. What are you doing?

NETTA. Filing all these letters that have accumulated in that cabinet for the last thirty-five years. At least, I think it's thirty-five years.

ERNEST. Shall I do that, too?

NETTA. Yes, you'll find stacks and stacks of them in there. [ERNEST *fetches a pile of letters and begins sorting them, standing beside* NETTA.] Now, I'm putting these in three piles. One, is "Parliamentary", two, is "Chickens", and three, everything that isn't either "Parliamentary" or "Chickens." And mind you get the dates in the right sequence. [*They work in silence for a while* ERNEST *continually glancing around to observe* NETTA'S *profile, and then nervously back to his work.*] You know you ought to be reading law.

ERNEST. Yes.

NETTA. Why aren't you?

ERNEST. Oh, I can't — not now. Besides I hate it so.

NETTA. And weren't you taught, ever since you were quite a little boy, that the things you hated most were always those that did you the most good?

ERNEST. Yes, it did seem like that.

NETTA. Of course it did. I'm afraid you haven't imbibed that principle very thoroughly. Oh dear that's on the wrong file. Chickens, chickens. You know we can't talk and work at the same time.

ERNEST. You know I don't believe that's true at all.

NETTA [*reading from a letter*]. Honourable Member. "Parliamentary." [*Looking up*] You don't believe that what isn't true?

ERNEST. Why that about the things you hate most being the best for you.

NETTA. Of course you don't. Nor do I. That's just the difference between the old and the new education. Nowadays the most progressive teachers try to find out what their pupils like best, with the idea that those are the things they are most fitted for.

ERNEST. That's an awfully good idea.

NETTA [*referring to a letter*]. Where's Rhode Island?

ERNEST. Somewhere in the States I think.

NETTA. Well what kind of Reds are Rhode Island Reds?

ERNEST. It's a breed of chickens.

NETTA. Oh, how disappointing! I thought they were some delightful new society of bomb-throwing anarchists.

ERNEST. D'you think anarchists are delightful?

NETTA. Well, I must say, their idol-breaking, world-shaking, whole-hoggery rather appeals to me. I hate complacency and fatty degeneration of the soul more than anything else in this world. You know there are times when I'm a perfectly potential anarchist, and could throw bombs with complete abandon. There are

some people it would give me the highest joy to blow to smithereens.

ERNEST. Are you thinking of father?

NETTA [*taken by surprise; getting out of the difficulty the best way she can*]. I happen to be your father's secretary.

ERNEST. I'm awfully sorry. That was a silly thing to say.

NETTA. Oh, don't spoil it all by apologizing.

ERNEST [*after a short pause*]. Will it take you long to finish this?

NETTA. Months! To judge by the height of the stack of letters in there.

ERNEST. I mean, must you work at it now?

NETTA. Of course I must. It's got to be finished.

ERNEST. Yes. [*He resumes his work. There is silence for a moment.*] You know I think we could talk and work at the same time.

NETTA. Well, I'm never very averse to talking. As long as we don't mix up the honourable members with the chickens.

ERNEST. All right. You know I rather like talking to you.

NETTA. D'you mean that as a compliment?

ERNEST. No — well — I mean it as a plain statement of fact.

NETTA. I'm glad to hear it.

ERNEST. Yes. You see you're so much easier to talk to than most of the people I know.

NETTA. I wonder why that is.

ERNEST. I don't know. I'd say things to you that I wouldn't dream of saying to anyone else.

NETTA. Why wouldn't you say them to anyone else?

ERNEST. Because they wouldn't understand them.

NETTA. I don't seem to find you particularly incomprehensible.

ERNEST. No, that's just it. You're sympathetic I suppose.

NETTA. Perhaps I am, though I assure you I don't feel in the least sympathetic towards some people.

ERNEST. Are they the ones you would like to blow to smithereens?

NETTA. Exactly.

ERNEST. I'm awfully stupid with most people, I suppose it's just shyness, but it's something I've never got over. Even now, when I walk into a room full of strange people, I feel as though I could sink through the floor. I'm sure they can all see my knees trembling. Even when I'm not shy and have to talk to someone I'm terrified of saying something idiotic. The result is that I say nothing but yes or no, and there are the most horrible silences.

NETTA. Did you feel like that with me when we first met?

ERNEST. No, I didn't—at least not after the first few minutes. Then I wasn't conscious of myself at all, and just said the first thing that came into my head without worrying whether it would sound idiotic.

NETTA. I know what it is. You're lonely. Lonely in mind, I mean. You feel that the things you love best, and want to talk about, are not the things that other people care about. The people you meet here simply can't talk about the things you love without smirching them in some way.

ERNEST [*gazing at her*]. I say, you're wonderful.

NETTA. Wonderful?

ERNEST. Yes. You've summed up the whole case in a few minutes. Of course that's what it is. D'you know the other day father took a book of mine out of my hand. While he was holding it I had the most terrible thoughts in my mind. I felt I hated my father. That's awful, isn't it?

NETTA. Perfectly dreadful, but absolutely natural in your case. What was the book?

ERNEST. Shelley.

NETTA. That is what you were reading when we first met.

ERNEST. Yes.

NETTA. Do you read Shelley much?

ERNEST. Oh yes. I think "Adonais" is wonderful, don't you?

NETTA. Yes. And "The West Wind." So poetry is one of the things you love?

ERNEST. Yes.

NETTA. And what else?

ERNEST. Oh, Nature and books and vague, impossible dreams . . .

[*Enter* LADY PARLOWE.]

LADY PARLOWE. Oh, there you are Ernest! How long have you been here? I've been looking for you everywhere. Will you go and tell Murdock to feed the chickens.

ERNEST [*reluctantly*]. I'm awfully busy mother.

LADY PARLOWE. What are you doing? Reading your law?

ERNEST. No, I'm helping Miss Montgomery.

LADY PARLOWE. Oh, Ernest, you really ought to be reading law. I'm afraid you're not getting on with it as well as your father would like.

ERNEST. No, mother, I'm not.

LADY PARLOWE. Well, why not? You know how anxious your father is to start you on a good career. I don't really think you ought to be wasting your time here.

NETTA. But he's not wasting his time, Lady Parlowe. He's helping me sort out Sir Benjamin's letters.

LADY PARLOWE. Oh, I do hope you're doing them carefully. Does Sir Benjamin know you're working on them?

NETTA. Yes.

LADY PARLOWE. You will be careful not to disarrange them, won't you?

NETTA. Disarrange them? But they've never been anything but disarranged — for the last thirty-five years. What *I* have to do is to arrange them.

LADY PARLOWE. Well, you will be careful, won't you?

NETTA. I think you may safely trust me.

LADY PARLOWE. Ernest, don't you think you'd better go downstairs and read law?

ERNEST. I think I'm doing something far more useful here.

LADY PARLOWE. But Ernest, your career . . .

ERNEST. I don't think law will ever be my career.

LADY PARLOWE [*shocked*]. Ernest! What would your father say?

ERNEST. I don't know, mother. But I'm going to ask him when he comes back to let me give up law.

LADY PARLOWE. What *will* you do?

ERNEST. I shall ask him to give me a small allowance and let me make my own way in the world.

LADY PARLOWE. My dear boy you'd starve.

ERNEST. No, I don't think I would.

LADY PARLOWE. Miss Montgomery I hope you haven't been trying to influence my son.

NETTA. If you mean have I been persuading him to give up law, Lady Parlowe, I can assure you that I never attempted such a thing.

LADY PARLOWE. Oh, I hope you haven't. Ernest is so easily led astray. Dear oh dear, I'm afraid Sir Benjamin will be dreadfully angry. He was so set on Ernest becoming a lawyer. He wants him to go into Parliament afterwards. Oh dear, I forgot all about it, I must go and tell Murdock to feed the chickens. [*She goes out.*]

NETTA. Well done.

ERNEST. D'you think I did right?

NETTA. Of course you did. It had to happen sooner or later, and the later you did it the harder it would have been.

ERNEST [*sobered at the thought*]. I've done nothing yet. I've got to tell father.

NETTA. You mustn't let that deter you. Your mother will probably tell him so he may open the subject. That will make it easier.

ERNEST. Oh yes, I hope she does. I say you'll help me won't you? I don't feel I could go through with it without you to back me up.

NETTA. Nonsense, of course you could. Things like that have to be done alone.

ERNEST. Yes, I know, but you will be on my side, won't you?

NETTA. Of course I will, and here's my hand on it.

[ERNEST *takes her hand and holds it, gazing into her eyes. Then, being very daring, he raises it to his lips.* BOLTON *comes in.*]

BOLTON. Please miss, the dep—, those men from the village, miss.

NETTA. Are they here?

BOLTON. Yes, miss.

NETTA. All three of them?

BOLTON. Yes, miss.

NETTA. All right, please send them up here.

BOLTON. Yes, miss.

NETTA. Ernest, I think, if you don't mind, you had better go. Thank you so much for helping me.

ERNEST [*flushed with the pleasure of hearing his first name*]. All right. May I come and help you again?

NETTA. Yes, do.

[ERNEST *goes out. The tramp of heavy feet sounds on the stairs.* BOLTON *opens the door and ushers in the deputation. It consists of* MATTHEW MUMBERSON, *white-bearded and patriarchal;* LUKE WHITLEY, *rotund and rubicund; and* ALBERT PEWSON, *the newcomer, short, dark, and alert.*]

NETTA. You may go, Bolton.

BOLTON. Very good.

[*He goes out. The deputation stands blinking and staring at finding itself in the presence of a young girl. With an almost simultaneous movement they snatch their caps from their heads.*]

NETTA. Good morning. I'm very glad to see you. Will you please bring up those chairs and sit in front of the desk. [*After they have done so*] Now, I'm Sir Benjamin Parlowe's secretary, so you may consider yourselves, if you like, as speaking to him. I am sorry he has had to go away for the day. Do you mind telling me all about this right of way business?

MUMBERSON Er-umm, it's like this here —

WHITLEY [*simultaneously*]. He ain't got no manner o' right —

PEWSON The wrongs of the peasantry —

NETTA. One at a time please, if you don't mind.

MUMBERSON [*glaring at one* It's like this—

WHITLEY *another and* What I always

PEWSON *starting afresh*]. We represent--

[*They glare at each other again and relapse into silence.*]

NETTA. I think perhaps it would be simpler if we were to appoint a spokesman. Mr. Mumberson, I think you probably have the right of seniority. Will you tell me all about it?

MUMBERSON. Ay, if you'll keep these young fellows from interrupting me.

NETTA. They won't interrupt.

MUMBERSON. I am an old man, I am, miss. Seventy-six come New Year's. Ay, seventy-six. My father he were eighty-four when he died. Eighty-four he were

and as lusty as a cricket till the end. Well as I was saying 'tis like this here. That there bit o' land o' Sir Benjamin's has been the property, as yer might say, o' us villagers for a long, long time. As long as I can remember, ay and a long, long time afore that. Why, I remembers my grandfather, 'e were ninety-seven when he died—read the noospaper the morning o' 'is death, 'e did. I can remember him when I was a young spout of a lad no higher than that there table. I can remember 'im saying to me, I was a-going into Bletherbury for 'im with a basket o' tomatters, 'e says to me, 'e says, Matty my boy, don't 'ee go jumping the old mare over Sir James' gate. I always rode that there mare to market, you see, miss. Don't go for to break down Sir James' gate, 'e says. I were a terrible one for horses in them days. There warnt a horse in this county I couldn't ride. And jumping, why I jumped that old mare over a five-barred gate on the top of a bank one time. Clean as a whistle she went over that there gate and the bank with six inches to spare. Oh, I were a terrible lad with an 'orse in them days. Why another time I mind . . .

NETTA. Thank you very much Mr. Mumberson. Now we have an excellent idea of how long the right of way has been in existence. [*Turning to* WHITLEY] Perhaps you will tell us your experience.

WHITLEY [*rising immediately to his feet*]. What I says is, he ain't got no manner o' right. That there road 'as been used for years and years, centuries and centuries, and if that amount o' time don't give folks a right o' way I'd like to know what does. That's what I'd like to know. What does? The grass is aworn clean away on that there road with the feet of the men, women and children o' this village a'going to and fro over it. And who's going to stop them? That's what I'd like to know. Sir Benjamin thinks he can. What'll he do? Eh? Gate? What's a gate? Fence? Who's going to let a fence stop him when he knows

he'll have to go three miles round by the road? I wouldn't, I'm tellin' yer, and you wouldn't, not you. You'd hop over that fence same as me. Sir Benjamin, he's in Parliament. Maybe he'll pass a law making us villagers go three miles round by the road. [*His voice rising and his arms gesticulating*] But I tell you, and I don't care who hears me, he'll have to stand there 'imself with a gun afore he can stop us villagers from using that road as our fathers and our grandfathers have done before us!

[*He sits down, produces a large red handkerchief and mops his brow.*]

MUMBERSON. Ay, ay, that's right. Stand there with a gun. So 'e will. So 'e will.

NETTA. Thank you. I hope we shall be able to come to a more satisfactory arrangement than that. [*Turning to* PEWSON *who has been listening to these speeches with a smile of amused toleration on his face*] Will you give us your opinion?

PEWSON [*quietly, with the restrained intentness of a practised speaker*]. You have already heard most of the facts. That piece of land has been used by the people in this neighbourhood as a public thoroughfare for at least one hundred and fifty years. No objection has ever been made until now, when, without a word of warning, it has been suddenly closed down. It is difficult for you to realize what this will mean to the poor villagers. [*Tracing lines with his finger on his left hand*] Wallingdon is here. Over here is Bletherbury, a market town, the source of the wretched incomes of eighty per cent. of the villagers. Mr. FitzWilliam's land lies here to the north with the road beyond it, which will mean a detour of over three miles and the loss of an hour's time to anybody passing from Wallingdon to Bletherbury, if this right of way is closed. It's tyranny miss, pure, unmitigated tyranny. The people of this country are not easily roused, but this is

the sort of thing that *will* rouse them. It is happening now. They are hard folk when their blood is up, and personally I wouldn't like to answer for the consequences if that right of way isn't re-opened.

NETTA. Yes. I'm aware that it's a serious situation.

WHITLEY. Ay, so it is. You may well say so. Tell 'im to open it up miss and let us go the quiet way we've always been going. Why shouldn't we? That's what I'd like to know. We ain't doing no harm.

MUMBERSON. Ay. That's right. We're quiet, peaceable folks, we is. We won't do no harm.

NETTA. I think we shall probably be able to find a way out. Sir Benjamin wants to extend his fowl run and he tells me there is no other available land but the right of way.

WHITLEY [*rising to his feet*]. Fowl run? Chickens? Is he going to put a lot of cackling chickens before the human beings o' this village? Does he think more of chickens than of men and women?

NETTA. Please sit down. We must talk this over quietly.

WHITLEY. Quiet won't do it. No, nor words neither. It's action we want. And it's action Sir Benjamin will get whether he wants it or not. Him and his chickens!

NETTA [*ignoring him*]. There are three ways out of it as far as I can see. The first is to get Sir Benjamin to give up the idea of the new fowl run. The second is to persuade him to use some other piece of land that he already has, and the third is for him to buy some new land from a neighbour. We ought to be able to manage it with one of those three.

WHITLEY. The first, I says. What's he want more chickens for? He's got hundreds and hundreds already.

NETTA. I'm inclined to think that is the most difficult way of the three. I happen to know that he has set his heart on extending the fowl run. He's a strong-willed man.

WHITLEY. So are we, miss, so are we. Don't let him forget that.

NETTA. No I won't. I think he's beginning to realize that already. Let me think now. He won't want to spend money if he can help it, so the third possibility is not very strong. No, I think I can persuade him to build the new fowl run somewhere else.

MUMBERSON. Good. Good. I'm that glad to hear you say so. Ay, I knew 'twould be all right when first I clapped my old eyes on you miss. I says to myself, I says, as soon as I come in this room, that's a smart young leddy, that is.

WHITLEY. We won't forget it, miss, if you can do that.

PEWSON. If you succeed in this, you'll get no material reward but at least you'll have the satisfaction of knowing that you've earned the undying gratitude of about two thousand people.

MUMBERSON. We'll put up a statue to 'ee. So we will. A big marble statue. We will, I tell 'ee. Good-bye, and God bless 'ee.

NETTA. Good-bye.

PEWSON *and* WHITLEY. Good-bye.

[*They are moving towards the door, when it opens and* SIR BENJAMIN PARLOWE *appears. He is struck dumb with surprise, and can only stand gaping while the deputation, beaming and smiling at* NETTA, *files past him.*]

SIR BENJAMIN [*recovering his speech, and advancing upon* NETTA]. Well, what's the meaning of this?

NETTA. I thought you weren't coming back until evening.

SIR BENJAMIN. I see, and so you took advantage of my absence to invite those bumpkins into my house and into my study to let loose their revolutionary talk on you.

NETTA. Yes, I expect it seems monstrous, but I did it for quite a worthy motive.

SIR BENJAMIN. Oh, you did, did you? And I suppose you let them tell you all about their intolerable grievances about the right of way.

NETTA. Yes, it was about the right of way that I wanted to speak to them.

SIR BENJAMIN. And didn't you hear me tell you, only this morning, that I refused to hear anything more about this miserable right of way. Didn't you?

NETTA. Yes, but you weren't supposed to hear anything about it. Not yet, at least. It was your fault for coming home early.

SIR BENJAMIN [*almost inarticulate with anger*]. My fault — my fault! How dare you? I never heard such confounded impudence in my life before! How did that filthy crew ever get up here? Didn't Bolton send them away?

NETTA. Yes. I sent them a note to come here.

SIR BENJAMIN. *You* sent them? And who took the note? Did Bolton take it? I'll give that man notice this minute.

[*He walks over to the bell.*]

NETTA. I wouldn't give Bolton the sack if I were you.

SIR BENJAMIN. Why not?

NETTA. Because he didn't take the note.

SIR BENJAMIN. Then who did? I'll sack whoever it was.

NETTA. You took it yourself.

SIR BENJAMIN. I? I? D'you mean to say that that note Bolton handed me—?

NETTA. Yes. Didn't you look at the address?

SIR BENJAMIN [*speechless for a while with rage and mortification*]. Well that ends it. That's absolutely the last straw. I won't stand your infernal impudence any longer! You can go, d'you understand! I've

finished with you! You'd better go and pack your trunk.

NETTA [*rising and facing him*]. You told me this morning that you had never engaged me as your secretary.

SIR BENJAMIN. I didn't. What about it?

NETTA. Well then, don't you see, if you never engaged me, you can't very well give me the sack.

[*They stare at each other for a moment then* NETTA *turns and goes out.*]

[CURTAIN]

ACT III

The scene is the same as Act I. It is evening, immediately after dinner, of the same day as Act. II. As the curtain goes up SIR BENJAMIN, LADY PARLOWE *and* FAITH CONCORD *enter.*

SIR BENJAMIN. It's no good, Faith, you can't persuade me now. Anyone who'd do a thing like that—interview a gang of ignorant bumpkins in my study, when I had just turned them away from my door—. Well, all I can say is, she's no good.

FAITH. You'll have to admit that she's a very capable secretary, and that she has brains.

SIR BENJAMIN. Brains? Yes, confound her, far too much brains! I won't deny that she's practical, methodical, and tolerably business-like, but it's perfectly clear that she isn't trustworthy. To do a thing like that behind my back!

LADY PARLOWE. And she must be trustworthy above everything, mustn't she, Benjamin?

SIR BENJAMIN. Yes, yes, of course. Trustworthy above everything.

FAITH. Are you going to keep her on?

SIR BENJAMIN. No, certainly not. I told her I had no further use for her services.

FAITH. Oh, Benjamin, you're not going to turn her out like that, without warning.

SIR BENJAMIN. Certainly I am. What else can she expect? She plumps herself down in this house without a word, and starts working as my secretary whether I want one or not. And then absolutely throws away her chances by doing a thing like that! I consider that I behaved very generously in allowing her to stay at all.

LADY PARLOWE. Benjamin, I'm afraid she's having a bad influence on Ernest.

SIR BENJAMIN. On Ernest? How?

LADY PARLOWE. By sympathizing with him about his poetry and all that. I feel that she's been encouraging him in the idea of giving up law.

SIR BENJAMIN. Giving up law? Who put that idea into his head?

LADY PARLOWE. I don't know, but he told me that he was going to ask your permission to give it up.

SIR BENJAMIN. Well, he won't get it! So there's an end of that!

FAITH. Hasn't the boy any say in the question of his future career, Benjamin?

SIR BENJAMIN. I consider that I know better than he does, what's best for him. And I don't want to hear any more about it from you, Faith.

LADY PARLOWE. When is Miss Montgomery going, Benjamin?

SIR BENJAMIN. I don't know. As soon as I can pack her off.

LADY PARLOWE. What did she say when you dismissed her?

SIR BENJAMIN. She had the impertinence to say that I couldn't send her away.

LADY PARLOWE. Why not?

SIR BENJAMIN. Oh, because I had never engaged her, or some nonsense of that sort.

FAITH. Never engaged her? Is it true?

SIR BENJAMIN. True? Yes, of course it's true. I never engaged her. She dumped herself down and began filing my letters and opening my mail without so much as a "by your leave".

FAITH. And do you mean to say you allowed her to do all that when you didn't want her as your secretary?

SIR BENJAMIN. Good heavens, woman, what could I do? I couldn't very well take her by the scruff of the neck and throw her out of the door, could I?

FAITH. Well, no. Not very well.

SIR BENJAMIN. That's the only thing that would have made her go, I can assure you.

[NETTA *comes in. On seeing her,* SIR BENJAMIN *feels unequal to further verbal contest and leaves the room. His wife follows.* NETTA *sits down and begins to read.* FAITH *takes up her knitting. There is silence for a while.*]

FAITH. I'm afraid, Miss Montgomery, you've rather spoiled your chances by that action of yours.

NETTA. Yes, it was just my luck. Everything would have been all right if Sir Benjamin hadn't come back just at that moment.

FAITH. Do you think you're looking at it in quite the right light? Wasn't it rather an unwise thing to do, whether he had come back or not?

NETTA. You wouldn't call it unwise, Miss Concord, if you knew the facts.

FAITH. Oh, but I do know the facts. I know all about this right of way business.

NETTA. And you still think it unwise of me to try to come to some amicable agreement?

FAITH. No, it's merely your method I object to. After all, Sir Benjamin is your employer. At least, he took you in and allowed you to work for him. . . . If you look at it in that light, I think you will see that what you did was certainly unwise, not to say — er — impertinent.

NETTA. Impertinent?

FAITH. Well, yes, I think so. You might at least have gone about it in some other way. You needn't have brought those men into Sir Benjamin's study.

NETTA [*hotly*]. Does Sir Benjamin think that they are not fit to sit in his study?

FAITH. No, of course not.

NETTA. He does. You know very well he does.

FAITH [*nettled*]. Well, that's beside the point. Aren't you willing to admit now that you were injudicious, to put it mildly—in your own interests, if for no other reason.

NETTA. My dear Miss Concord, I've no doubt that, to you, my action was quite unwarrantable. You fail to see my point of view because you fail completely to understand me. When I see a thing that's crying out to be done and realize that I can do it, I set about it at once in the quickest and easiest way, without thought for consequences, apart from the main issue.

FAITH. Was it your business to try and set this matter right?

NETTA. It's everybody's business to see justice done. I knew, as soon as I heard about this business, and I know now, that the question would never be settled as it should be, as things were. I also knew that there was one person and one only, fitted to be the mediator between the two parties. I did my best and as far as I can see I failed. I don't see that there's anything more to be said.

FAITH. I'm afraid you're very obstinate.

NETTA. You may call it obstinacy if you like. I prefer a more high-sounding name. I struck a blow in the great fight to prevent the poor people of this country from oppression.

FAITH. You talk like one of those horrid socialists.

NETTA. Oh, but I am one of those horrid socialists! Didn't Sir Benjamin tell you that I read *The Independent*?

FAITH. D'you mean to say you approve of those awful men who go about in red ties with bombs in their pockets?

NETTA. Curiously enough I'm rather like you in your judgment of myself. I applaud their sentiments and disapprove of their methods. But I don't think they really have bombs in their pockets. They're such bulky things.

FAITH. I don't see how you can possibly talk lightly of such awful people.

NETTA. I'm very sorry, but you must take me as you find me, mustn't you?

FAITH [*sharply*]. I don't see that there is any necessity for me to "take you" at all.

[*She rises and leaves the room hastily.* NETTA *stares after her for a moment, then resumes her book.* LADY PARLOWE *and* ERNEST *come in. They do not see* NETTA.]

LADY PARLOWE. Ernest, I don't think Miss Montgomery is a very suitable friend for you. She's so—so —modern—and all that. I don't think you ought to go up to your father's study and help her with her work. . . . That girl has moved this table again! I do wish she'd leave things as they ought to be. [NETTA *closes her book with a bang.* LADY PARLOWE *starts and turns quickly.*] Oh, dear, I didn't see you there. I beg your pardon. Did you — — ? I mean — —

NETTA. Why do you think I'm not a suitable friend for your son, Lady Parlowe?

LADY PARLOWE. Oh, then, you did hear. I am so sorry. . . .

NETTA. Surely there's no need to apologize, if you really meant what you said.

LADY PARLOWE. Oh, yes, I meant . . . . at least . . . . Oh, I must tell Meadows about these flowers, to-morrow. They're getting so faded!

NETTA. Do tell me your reason.

[LADY PARLOWE *sits, determined to make a real effort to be pleasant.* ERNEST *watches closely first one, and then the other.*]

LADY PARLOWE. Well, you see, it's really very difficult for me to explain. You see, you're so different from all of us, you've got such very modern ideas.

You're really like someone from another country. Some foreigner. Oh, please don't take offence.

NETTA. There's nothing offensive in being told you're like a foreigner.

LADY PARLOWE. Isn't there? I'm so dreadfully afraid I shall say something that you won't like. I'm so bad at expressing myself.

NETTA. I'd much rather you'd say exactly what's in your mind without worrying whether it will offend me. I'm used to that sort of thing.

LADY PARLOWE. Are you? I'm so sorry. I'm afraid I can't tell you exactly what's in my mind. It's so difficult, but I feel it all the same.

NETTA. Shall I help you? I think perhaps I can put your feelings into words. You object to my being friendly with your son because, as you say, I'm so different from you. You and your husband have a certain mode of life, and way of thinking which you have always had, and which has become a sort of second nature to you, and you resent any attempt at intrusion upon this. That's it, isn't it? You want to continue in your smooth, well-ordered lives. I'm an intruder. It's a very, very old story. You want Ernest to become a lawyer and then to enter Parliament, because that is your idea of a satisfactory career. If he were to do as he wants and be independent of you, you wouldn't like it because that would be contrary to your accepted standard of values. Do tell me if I'm right.

LADY PARLOWE. Yes, I suppose so. Yes. Of course our ways of living are quite different, aren't they? Our ideas are different and you can't mix oil and water, can you? That's what it is, you see, it would mix things up so for Ernest. He'd lose his mental—mental—. Oh, what is the word?

NETTA. Equilibrium.

LADY PARLOWE. Equilibrium. Yes, that's it. Don't lose your equilibrium, Ernest.

ERNEST. No, mother, I won't. I think I'm just beginning to gain it.

LADY PARLOWE. Oh, Ernest that can't be true. To want to go off by yourself like that.

NETTA. I think he's right, Lady Parlowe. There's nothing like independence. However, that's no affair of mine. If you think I'm having a bad influence on your son it's easy for you to stop it. In any case I don't think there's any cause for you to worry.

LADY PARLOWE [*thinking she sees a gleam of hope*]. Oh—yes, now . . . . there was something I wanted to ask you—after that—that affair yesterday—I mean the men coming up from the village, did Sir Benjamin give you—I mean didn't he tell you that he didn't want you as his secretary any more?

NETTA. He did.

LADY PARLOWE. Oh yes, I'm so sorry, but you know I can't help feeling that it's for the best. Benjamin thinks quite a lot of your abilities—as a secretary I mean. Oh yes he does, really. He told me he thought you were very methodical and capable. But all the same I do feel that you wouldn't be happy. Benjamin is so very strong-willed—oil and water you know.

NETTA. I've no doubt you are right, Lady Parlowe.

LADY PARLOWE. Yes, I feel sure I am. You wouldn't be happy. Oh no! [*She rises.*] Well, I must go and talk to cook about that cauliflower we had for dinner. It was so hard.

[LADY PARLOWE *goes out. There is a rather awkward silence.*]

ERNEST. What did you mean just now when you said that there was no cause for mother to worry?

NETTA. Simply that the cause for her worry will shortly be removed.

ERNEST. Do you mean that you're going?

NETTA. Yes.

ERNEST [*after a pause*]. When did you make up your mind?

NETTA. About a quarter of an hour ago.

ERNEST. Was it because father gave you the sack?

NETTA. That wouldn't prevent me from staying if I really wanted to.

ERNEST. Well, why?

NETTA. Because I've failed.

[*There is another awkward pause.*]

ERNEST. You would soon have been a tremendous help to father.

NETTA. Yes, I know. It's just that that makes it so sickening.

ERNEST. Won't you tell me what it was you failed in? I heard all about the deputation coming from the village.

NETTA. It was just that. I interviewed the deputation and practically promised that Sir Benjamin would let them have their way. Then, just as they were going away, very grateful to me, in walks your father. There was an awful scene. Of course, it just wrecked everything. If your father was determined before to keep that right of way closed, he's fifty times more determined now. That's where I've failed. I shall have to break my promise to those poor villagers.

ERNEST. You may be able to persuade father yet.

NETTA. Never. I know him better than to suppose there's any hope now. It was just a bit of infernal bad luck, that's all.

ERNEST. I'm awfully sorry.

NETTA. Thank you, Ernest. Yes, I think you are. But don't imagine for one moment that I regret doing what I did.

ERNEST [*breaking another silence*]. Have you finally decided to go?

NETTA. Yes. Absolutely. You see I'm a misfit here —an intruder. I wouldn't have minded that—in fact I

realized from the first how it would be. But I could have gone through with it. It would have been a fight, but I'd have won in the end, and then everything would have been plain sailing. But now . . . .

ERNEST. What are you going to do?

NETTA. I don't know. I have no plans. I'll get another job as secretary, I suppose.

ERNEST. Won't your mother be very much worried?

NETTA. Yes. Don't rub it in. Oh, it'll be all right. I shan't starve, you may be quite sure of that.

ERNEST. Netta, I wish I could help you. I could, I'm sure I could. Let me help you. Let me protect you. Don't you see. We're both together in this? We're in the same boat. You remember what I said about giving up law.

NETTA. Oh Ernest, are you going to be cast adrift on the world, too?

ERNEST. Yes. Yes. Oh, don't you see, don't you understand what I'm trying to say? I'm fond of you Netta. I love you. Let's be together in this.

NETTA. Ernest, please.

ERNEST. Why not? We could. If you'll marry me I could give you my protection. I'm a man now, though everybody here tries to make me forget it. Let's go out and fight the world together. Oh, it would be splendid just you and me together, against the world.

NETTA. My poor boy, what on earth would we live on? Oh, I'm sorry to be so devastatingly practical and spoil all your splendid dreams, but we can't live without money, you know.

ERNEST. Oh, we would soon make some. We might have to wait a little, but it wouldn't be for long.

NETTA. I'm awfully sorry, but I'm afraid it's quite impossible.

ERNEST. Nothing's impossible if you try hard enough. We could do it if—if you cared for me a little. Do you Netta? Do you care for me at all?

NETTA. Ernest, my dear friend, you want me to be

candid, don't you? You want me to tell you the truth, even though it hurts a little. You want me to tell you that I like you very much, and that I'll be a sister to you, and all that foolishness. We'll take that for granted. The truth is that I'm not made like that. I don't think that I'm the sort that gets married. I'm in love with other things. I don't care for you a bit in the way you want me to. I'm sorry if I hurt you, but I don't.

ERNEST. All right. I'm sorry. I won't say any more.

[*She pauses for* ERNEST *to speak.*]

NETTA. Now I'm going to be old fashioned and sentimental and give you some good advice. Don't think about this any more. Forget about me. Oh, you'll find it easier afterwards when I'm gone. Concentrate entirely on the things you love: your books, nature and poetry. Do nothing else. Think of nothing else. . . . You'll be able to write poetry, I'm sure you will. Make that your one aim, your art. You have talent and you may have genius. Let nothing hinder you in this. Nothing, nothing, nothing in this world. Starve for it, fight for it, work for it. Set a goal for yourself and let no one stop you from getting there. That's the only thing that's worth doing in this world.

ERNEST [*his face lighting up*]. Oh, I will, I will. But all the same I shan't forget you, I couldn't now. I can do all that and be thinking of you at the same time. Why, you wouldn't hinder me. You'll help me. Nearly all the great poets had some woman who was an inspiration to them. Look at Dante and Keats. They wouldn't have been the poets they were if it hadn't been for Beatrice and Fanny. You'll be my inspiration.

NETTA. Ernest, dear.

ERNEST. Yes, you will. And I won't stop hoping for you. I'll ask you again before long. You'll let me come and see you sometimes, won't you?

NETTA. Yes, if you want to. I can't prevent you doing that.

ERNEST [*cast down once more*]. When are you going?

NETTA. To-night. Now.

ERNEST. Now?

NETTA. Yes, it's much better. I always believe in doing a thing at once. There's a train at 9.05. I shall walk to the station. It's a lovely night. Will you tell Bolton to send my luggage on to my address?

ERNEST. All right. May I walk with you to the station?

NETTA. I'd rather you didn't, Ernest. I hate to refuse you a thing like that, but—but—oh, I don't know—I'm a little worried about things and I rather want to be alone—walking through the dark. You can understand that, can't you?

ERNEST [*ruefully*]. Yes, I can. All right, I'll let you be alone.

NETTA. Well, I'll say good-bye, Ernest. You've been awfully kind to me. I can't possibly thank you enough.

ERNEST [*taking her hand*]. Good-bye. I say, where's your hat?

NETTA. It's in the hall. I'll put it on as I go out.

ERNEST. Have you—are you sure—? Is there enough money?

NETTA. Plenty thanks—to take me home. Thank you so much. Good-bye now.

ERNEST. Netta, would you mind—could I—?

[*He leans forward as though to kiss her, but she draws back and shakes her head.*]

NETTA [*moving to the door*]. Good-bye, Ernest.

ERNEST. Good-bye, Netta.

[*She passes out with a bright smile.* ERNEST *drops into a fit of musing.* LADY PARLOWE *and* FAITH CONCORD *enter.*]

FAITH. It doesn't matter in the least if Benjamin did dismiss her. If she doesn't want to go she'll stay. I know that type.

LADY PARLOWE. But, Faith, Benjamin told her to pack off at once. She can't very well stay on after that.

FAITH. Can't she? You evidently don't know much about her. Didn't you hear Benjamin say what she told him about his not being able to dismiss her?

LADY PARLOWE. Ernest, my dear boy, can't you find something better to do than to sit there doing nothing? Haven't you a book to read?

ERNEST. Yes, mother. [*He takes up his Shelley.*]

LADY PARLOWE. I don't like to see you idle. [*To* FAITH] I don't think you need pay much attention to that, Faith. That was only bluff. I had a few words with her and I think she's about ready to go. I must say I hope she does.

FAITH. I had a few words with her, too. I gave her a piece of my mind. I always believe in plain speaking, and I told her just what I thought. Do you think she actually approves of those awful socialists? She told me she was one herself. I hope she goes, too, though I very much doubt it. She's a dangerous woman.

ERNEST [*who can stand this no longer*]. There's no need for you to say any more bad things about her, Aunt Faith.

FAITH [*sharply*]. And why not, may I ask?

ERNEST. Because she's gone.

FAITH.
LADY PARLOWE. } Gone?

ERNEST. Yes.

FAITH. But I was speaking to her here a short while ago.

ERNEST. Well, she's gone now.

LADY PARLOWE. When did she go?

ERNEST. Just this minute. She's probably walking down the drive now.

FAITH. D'you mean for good?

ERNEST. Yes. She wants us to send her luggage on to her home.

FAITH. Well I *am* surprised. So soon!

LADY PARLOWE. I'm sure it's all for the best. Benjamin will be quite relieved. I know he was worrying about her. You know it might have been quite awkward if she had refused to go. Benjamin would have had to call a policeman.

FAITH. Ernest, how d'you know she's gone?

ERNEST. Because I was here when she went. She said good-bye to me.

FAITH. Oh, she said good-bye to you? did she, and then went off without a word to anyone else? Upon my soul that young lady has ideas of her own. Didn't she even see Benjamin?

ERNEST [*hotly*]. No of course not.

FAITH. Why "of course"?

ERNEST. Well father dismissed her didn't he? I don't see that there was any need for her to thank him and say good-bye.

[SIR BENJAMIN *comes in.*]

SIR BENJAMIN. Where is Miss Montgomery? I want her to type out a speech for me. There won't be time in the morning.

FAITH. She's gone.

SIR BENJAMIN. Gone? Where?

FAITH. Away. For good.

SIR BENJAMIN. Gone away? Do you mean she's not coming back?

LADY PARLOWE. No, Benjamin dear. You didn't want her, did you?

SIR BENJAMIN. Want her. Of course I want her. I have a whole lot of work for her to do.

LADY PARLOWE. But, Benjamin, I thought you dismissed her.

SIR BENJAMIN. I may have spoken hastily at the

moment. You don't mean to say she took me seriously and went.

FAITH. Apparently that's what she's done, and I must say, Benjamin, I think it was for the best.

SIR BENJAMIN. Oh, shut up, woman, you don't know what you're talking about! Good Lord, I had stacks of work for her to do, and now I'll have to do it all myself. Why, she'd only just begun to sort and file all my correspondence—stuff that's been accumulating in my cabinet, all mixed up, for the last thirty-five years.

LADY PARLOWE. Oh, Benjamin, she was so untrustworthy.

SIR BENJAMIN. Untrustworthy, be damned! She was the most business-like, methodical person I ever met. She'd have been the greatest possible help to me.

LADY PARLOWE. Benjamin, dear, we'll advertise for another secretary.

SIR BENJAMIN. What's the good of that? We'll only have some backboneless young man slopping about the place. I'll never get another like her. Never. Never! [BOLTON *comes in from an inner room carrying two suitcases and a rug. He crosses to the French window.*] What the devil have you got there?

BOLTON. Miss Montgomery's luggage, sir.

[SIR BENJAMIN *is completely baffled.*]

[CURTAIN]

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

CARROLL AIKINS has achieved a wide reputation through his work in the theatre which he built, in 1920, on his ranch in the Okanagan Valley, British Columbia. Mr. Aikins's distinguished work as a producer and author of plays has made a very important contribution to the development of a native Canadian drama. A number of distinguished productions have been achieved by his group of Canadian players in the Home Theatre, including Mr. Aikins's own Passion Play—*Victory in Defeat*—in 1922, which marked a notable experiment in dramatic productions in Canada.

L. A. MACKAY is a recent graduate of the University of Toronto and is at present at Balliol College, Oxford, as a Rhodes Scholar.

LESLIE REID, who is in the service of the Government of Ontario, is a recent graduate of the University of Toronto. Since the establishment of Hart House Theatre, he has taken an active part in its productions as an actor, having played many parts. Mr. Reid is the author of a very successful first novel, *The Rector of Maliseet*, published in 1925.

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